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**RETURN TO MEXICO:
EXPLORING THE (RE)INTEGRATION EXPERIENCE**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Migration Studies
School of Global Studies

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

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PHD IN MIGRATION STUDIES
RETURN TO MEXICO: EXPLORING THE (RE)INTEGRATION EXPERIENCE
SUMMARY

This is a study about the return of migrants to their countries of origin and their subsequent reintegration experiences. By using qualitative research tools, this thesis aims to respond to the research question: What factors shape returnees' (re)integration experiences? While the thesis is not explicitly comparative in nature, in order to analyse the ways in which contexts of return shape returnees' reintegration experiences, this research was conducted in two contrasting localities in Mexico: the rural municipality of Huaquechula in the state of Puebla, and Mexico City; both are non-traditional emigration areas with high levels of return.

Existing studies on Mexican migration are often focused on one of three approaches: emigration, immigration or transnationalism. Despite the fact that return migration has always been part of the Mexico-USA migration cycle, it has received relatively little scholarly attention. Similarly, very little regard is paid to the reintegration processes that Mexican migrants experience when relocating to their country of origin. This naturalistic view of return migration sees reintegration as unproblematic, since individuals relocate, or are relocated to, the place where it is alleged they 'naturally belong'. The lack of research in these fields indicates that there is still little understanding of these multi-causal and multi-layered processes linked to return.

The thesis, argues that, in order to gain a better understanding of the reintegration experiences of returnees, it is important to adopt a 'holistic' approach, and proposes the use of the '(re)integration framework' (developed for my analysis of this case study) as its key analytical tool. The findings demonstrate that reintegration experiences are strongly linked to numerous variables: migrants' motivations to migrate and return, their age at the time of migration, their gendered life course¹ aspects (such as the number of dependents and family roles), and, most importantly, their contexts of return. In turn, these aspects influence the wellbeing of returnees which in turn shape and influence their sense of belonging and future aspirations.

In exploring the interconnections between current wellbeing, sense of belonging and long-term life expectations, the thesis contributes to our understanding of why a significant number of Mexican returnees consider re-migrating, either internally or internationally, as one of the few ways to pursue their ideal of *vivir mejor* (living well). Moreover, the inability of many returnees to re-migrate generates new challenges which affect their opportunities to (re)integrate and to contribute to their communities of return. This inability to re-migrate leaves them in a protracted limbo state which is detrimental, not only to their individual wellbeing, but also to the wellbeing of their families and entire communities.

¹ The term life course examines the social constructedness of age and changes which are not always biologically and sequentially structured but rather examines 'critical life junctures' and how lives are linked (Wright 2018)

*Dedico con amor este trabajo a mi padre y a mi hijo,
infinitas gracias por sus vidas y enseñanzas.*

1. Introduction

This is a study about a still-overlooked aspect of the ‘story’ of migration, namely return, and within that field, the largely ignored topic of reintegration of returnees. Those studying migration are often focused on one of three approaches - either on emigration (e.g. what causes people to migrate and how they migrate), on immigration (e.g. the process of adaptation that migrants undergo while in the ‘host country’) or on transnationalism (e.g. the set of sustained long-distance, border-crossing connections including the delivery of social and financial remittances; Vertovec 2004). Despite the fact that return migration has always been part of any migration cycle, it has received much less scholarly attention (King 2017). In addition to this, the existing literature on return migration is often focused on narrow classifications, for example based on the level of agency and volition involved in the movement as ‘voluntary or forced’; or who returns, ‘first, 1.5, or second generation’. While these typologies were initially useful, researchers have started to question the categorisation of returnees into these delimited groups and have asserted that these typologies deserve further discussion as the distinctions do not reflect the diversity of returnees’ profiles, ‘homecoming’ motivations and/or pressures, and circumstances (van Hear 1998; see also Koch 2014; Webber 2011).

Along these lines, it is a paradox that whilst so much attention is paid in the migration literature to the integration process that migrants experience in their ‘host’ countries, so little regard is paid to the reintegration process that migrants experience when relocating to their country of origin. This naturalistic view of return migration sees reintegration as unproblematic as individuals relocate, or are relocated to, the place where it is alleged they ‘naturally belong’ (Ghanem 2003; Lietaert et al. 2017). There are several erroneous assumptions that underpin this simplistic and conservative framing of reintegration: among them, that the migrant has not been changed by the experience abroad, that the ‘home’ country has not changed during the migrant’s absence, that return is a definite conclusion to the migration project, or that migrants’ return is temporary. These assumptions indicate that there is still little understanding of this complex and multi-layered process and of the current migration contexts in which migrants, particularly the undocumented ones, face increased dangers (Kuschminder 2017:15).

Various authors assert that understanding migrants’ reintegration experiences upon return requires a ‘holistic’ approach whereby motivations and experiences during previous

migration phases are considered (Lietaert et al. 2017; see also Gualda and Escriva 2014; van Houte and Davids 2009). In addition to this, the literature highlights the relevance that other factors such as gender, life course, education, occupation and contexts of return have in shaping the reintegration experiences of migrants (Bujan 2015; Cassarino 2004; Cerase 1974; Hansesn 2008; King 2000; Kuschminder 2017; Negi et al. 2018). My research takes into consideration these multiple aspects while analysing the case study of Mexico and concludes that some of these aspects become structural constraints for their reintegration processes.

Two main research standpoints can be identified in regarding the human dimension of post-return experiences. The first focuses on objective wellbeing and tries to explain returnees' reintegration process through their access to material domains such as employment. For the Mexican case, this approach is more associated with quantitative studies of migrant post-return experiences where reintegration outcomes are often labelled as successful or unsuccessful based on the analysis of objective aspects (see Alba et al. 2010; Gandini et al. 2015). The second approach focuses on migrants' own assessment of their objective conditions – subjective wellbeing –, and on their psychosocial wellbeing. The resultant interest in the psychosocial wellbeing of returnees has produced a growing body of literature that has highlighted the relevance of looking at this aspect (see Ammassari 2003; Gmelch 1980; Hasselberg 2013; van Hear 1998; van Meeteren et al. 2014; Vathi and King 2017). However, researchers have also looked into the human wellbeing concept which refers to 'a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals and where one enjoys satisfactory quality of life' (Gough and McGregor 2007:34). This approach considers the interplay between material (objective wellbeing and the subjective analysis of it), perceptual (psychosocial wellbeing) and relational domains (Wright 2012b:470).

Due to my professional experience of providing psychosocial services for migrants and refugees, I am aware of the significance of understanding, and if possible, promoting the wellbeing in its three arenas (objective, psychosocial and relational). Therefore, in this thesis I argue that migrants' reintegration experiences can only be fully understood through a 'wide-ranging' or 'holistic' approach which encompasses these three elements, how they intersect and link.

Return, reintegration and human wellbeing: it is within this triple nexus of literature that I situate this thesis which argues that returnees' reintegration process, and furthermore their

future aspirations, are influenced and shaped by pre-return, return, and post-return experiences, their contexts of return, including the socio-economic characteristics of the place of return, governmental policies, norms and structural constraints, as well as returnees' gendered life course, education and occupation, and wellbeing. In suggesting this, I add to the growing number of empirical studies that highlight the relevance of studying the 'human wellbeing of migrants', as the result of a reintegration process (see Vathi and King 2017).

The fourfold purpose of this first chapter is to briefly introduce the justification for this study; set out the framework in which the reintegration of Mexican returnees happens; specify the research questions which guide this study; and provide an overview of my thesis. In the first and longest section of this chapter I present key moments in the history of Mexico-USA migration, laying special emphasis on the policies that have shaped the return of Mexican migrants from the USA and migrants' reintegration to their country of origin. In a second section, I discuss the socio-economic contexts in Huaquechula, Puebla and Mexico City, the chosen field sites for this study. This is followed by an outline of the questions that shaped this research, and finally a summary of what will be discussed in the thesis, chapter by chapter.

1.1. Key moments in the history of the Mexico-USA migration system

The history of the Mexico-USA migration system has complex origins rooted in well-known factors such as demographic and economic inter-dependency between the two countries. Regarding its return flow, despite this having been a constant feature, there have been critical moments which have triggered an increased number of returns. These include the 'Mexican Repatriation' of 1929; 'Operation Wetback' of 1954; the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996; the attacks of 09/11; and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, and thereafter.

The presence of Mexicans in the USA has been continuous over a long period, above all due to the demand of their labour. Various authors identify that the first peak in Mexican immigration was during the late 1800s due to the California Gold Rush² and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882³. By the 1900s with the advances in communication in Mexico (due

² The California Gold Rush was the largest mass migration in American history. It all started in 1848 when significant amounts of gold were found in (the former Mexican territory of) California.

³ USA law which prohibited all immigration of Chinese workers, therefore the demand for Mexican labour increased.

to the construction of railroads) and the failure of fulfilling the Mexican Revolution promises of development on one hand, and the financial progress in the USA on the other, the Mexican immigration flow increased even more (Gibson and Jung 2006 in Passel et al. 2012:42). It was due to the Great Depression of 1929 that Mexico witnessed its first massive⁴ return of migrants known as the 'Mexican Repatriation'. Return was a result of a drastic anti-immigrant campaign promoting 'voluntary and spontaneous'⁵ returns and implementing deportations of both documented and undocumented residents (Durand et al. 2001:109; López 2012:170). The Mexican government's response was to support experienced and qualified returnees by creating jobs in the agriculture sector, from which however very few benefited. According to Escobar (2008, 2012), the participation of the Mexican government in the deportations during the 'Mexican Repatriation' and the poor provision of working opportunities for returnees marked the beginning of a tense and distant relationship between migrants and the government.

During World War II the USA faced a significant worker shortage as a result of the conscription of civilians. Therefore they launched the *Programa Bracero* (1942-1964)⁶. This 'guest worker' programme had the main objective to incorporate Mexican workforce into the USA economy. In addition to the workers who were officially hired, there was a significant increase in the number of Mexicans who decided to migrate in an undocumented fashion outside the auspice of the programme. Moreover, the unauthorised migration flow grew alongside two illegal practices, smuggling and the hiring of undocumented migrants by employers who sought to avoid the higher costs associated with participation in the formal labour importation programme. Due to the increasing concerns related to the volume of undocumented migrants⁷ in its territory, the USA government implemented various actions⁸ including the 'Operation Wetback' in 1954 which was a mass detention and repatriation of undocumented migrants. While there is not an agreement on the actual numbers of people

⁴ Some authors calculate approximately 500,000.

⁵ Allowed migrants who were at risk of deportation to leave at their own expense, saving the government the detention and deportation costs and procedures, while giving the migrant the possibility of future 'legal' re-entry.

⁶ The *Programa Bracero* was born as part of the Emergency Farm Labour Agreement in the summer of 1942.

⁷ At that time also called *mojados* (wetbacks).

⁸ The increment in the Border Patrol's budget and the almost doubled number of agents working in the US-Mexico borderlands; the USA Border Patrol deployed small teams of USA Border Patrol officers specifically directed to target, apprehend, and deport undocumented Mexican nationals already within its territory; and the erection of the first fence aimed to control Mexican immigration in the State of California (López 2012:171; Lytle-Hernandez 2006:439).

deported, the USA government claimed that just in 1954 they managed to deport 1.3 million people. During this period, the response of the Mexican government was to support the reintegration of returnees by creating jobs, on this occasion, in the *maquila* (factory) sector which turned out to be an employment not suitable for former agricultural workers (Escobar 2008, 2012; Mercier 2005), leaving most of the returnees unemployed.

Despite the apparent efforts to reduce undocumented migration, during the 1970s and 1980s there was a new increase of Mexicans in the USA, reaching 2.2 million by the end of the 1980s. This growth in emigration from the Mexican side was due to a change in this country's economic policy, which aimed to support urban and industrial development instead of supporting agriculture and had, among other consequences, a sustained emigration flow of agricultural workers to urban sites, but also internationally. As a response to this increase, the US Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986. This legislation was a significant milestone in the Mexico-USA migration flow since it had several provisions that allowed long-term undocumented immigrants to acquire permanent resident status. As one of the consequences of the IRCA the USA imposed, once more, measures to stop undocumented migration⁹ (Cornelius and Sheyan 2007; Delgado-Wise and Marquez-Covarrubias 2008; Massey and Pren 2012:1016). With the implementation of the IRCA, the Mexican government recovered its concerns about the possible return of those who did not meet the requirements of this regularisation programme. This time, the Mexican government responded by setting up camps at its northern border, to provide advice and financial assistance for returnees to reach their home towns (Escobar 2008, 2012).

During the 1990s, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had even more drastic consequences on the slowdown of Mexican agricultural production. Consequently, Mexican migration to the USA continued growing, reaching 9.4 million by 2000. This time, a new provision imposed by the USA to try to decrease the numbers of undocumented migrants was the approval of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996. With the IIRIRA, immigration enforcement became how we know it today, whereby migrants (both documented and undocumented) became criminalised and deportation is a constant and plausible threat to millions of them. Aside from the increased resources for border enforcement, it became a legal framework to criminalise undocumented

⁹ Sanctions for employers who hired undocumented migrants and increased border security to deter unauthorised entries.

migration by increasing penalties on migrants who had violated USA law in any way¹⁰; to strip migrants from any possibility to fight their case¹¹ so they would be fast-tracked to deportation; and to eliminate possibilities for people to obtain immigration status by banishing them from the country for three to 10 years for having entered without proper authorisation (Hagan et al. 2008:65). Moreover, the law called for retroactive punishment so that pre-1996 crimes that were not defined as aggravated felonies became cause for deportation under IIRIRA, even if the convicted residents had completed their prison sentences. Depending on the reason for deportation, an immigrant could be barred from re-entry into the USA from five years, to life (Morawetz 2001 in Hagan et al 2008:65).

The 9/11 attacks in the USA triggered an increase in the securitisation of borders and in anti-immigrant sentiments. Therefore, further steps were taken towards the deterrence of undocumented migration. Actions such as the Homeland Security Act of 2003¹², the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002, the Operation Streamline of 2005¹³ and the extension of Secure Communities in 2008 have increased the apprehension of migrants by creating and deploying the machinery to implement the actions that the IIRIRA enabled (Gandini et al. 2015:147). In addition, a growing number of states enacted their own immigration enforcement programmes¹⁴. These various measures have significantly changed the Mexico-USA migration patterns by reducing migrants' circularity and new undocumented arrivals; increasing the risks when crossing undocumented; and leading to an increased number of (forced and compelled) returns (Gandini et al. 2015:153).

Due to the Global Financial Crises of 2008, for the first time in 80 years, the Mexico-USA migration flow experienced a slowdown. Various studies show that despite the Financial

¹⁰ Whether they were undocumented migrants who had violated immigration law or documented ones who had committed any crimes.

¹¹ People who had committed any crime were not even allowed to go in front of a judge any more, it also reduced the discretionary power of immigration judges, and increased the income-requirements to sponsor an immigrant.

¹² This included the creation of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE. ICE was granted a unique combination of civil and criminal authorities to "better protect national security and public safety".

¹³ This is a joint initiative of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice, which adopts a zero-tolerance approach to unauthorised border-crossing by engaging in criminal prosecution of those engaging in it. With this development it established 'fingerprinting' upon crossing which makes people traceable and if they re-enter would be penalised with years in prison.

¹⁴ The June 2004 street-level immigration sweeps in southern California are evidence of this development, resulting in 11,000 ad-hoc interrogations and some 450 formal detentions and deportations (Cooney 2008:27–28; Wilson and Murillo 2004 in Coleman 2007:60).

Crises affecting the construction and services sectors¹⁵, there was not a massive return flow of Mexican migrants but still a significant one. Furthermore, research shows that in addition to this decrease of migrants' arrivals, there has been an increase in removals¹⁶ of newcomers and residents with longer time in the USA (López 2012:174). Firm data on this phenomenon are sketchy, but Pew Research Center estimates, based on official data from both countries, that there are at least one million people who returned from the USA to Mexico (including US-born children) between 2009 and 2014 of which only 14 percent of these returnees may have been deported (González-Barrera 2015). González-Barrera (2015) shows the overall flow of Mexican migrants between the two countries is at its smallest since the 1990s, mostly due to a drop in the number of people traveling for the first time or re-entering the USA. A particularly interesting development is that in contrast to the decrease in undocumented migration from Mexico, documented migration has risen, with entries by permanent residents climbing from 90,000 to 146,000 between 1995 and 2012 while entries by temporary workers rose from 20,000 to 623,000 (Massey et al. 2015:1017).

Despite serious ongoing discussions about the possibility of a comprehensive immigration reform legislation in the USA, these efforts have been unsuccessful. Therefore less expansive immigration measures have received increased attention. One such proposal is the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which would provide a path to legalisation for eligible undocumented youth and young adults¹⁷. Due to the rejection of the DREAM Act at the USA Congress in 2001, 2007 and 2010, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)¹⁸ was introduced in 2012 as an executive action. Reports show that at this time the Mexican response has been to provide identity documents to any person who qualified for DACA. Furthermore, the Mexican government actively promotes (and for some cases, even finance) the naturalisation of any Mexican citizens in the USA in order to reduce the numbers of migrants at risk of being deported to Mexico.

¹⁵ Which employ millions of undocumented Mexican migrants.

¹⁶ 'Administrative removals' and 'expedited removals' together comprise the deportations reported by the USA Department of Homeland Security.

¹⁷ The DREAM Act would have allowed undocumented migrants who arrived in the USA before their 16th birthday and who have no criminal record to study or join the USA military in a path to citizenship.

¹⁸ DACA is an executive action which gives young undocumented migrants protection from deportation, and access to a work permit, giving the possibility for many to complete their studies. This temporary protection expires after two years and is subject to renewal.

Under the current administration the threat of a massive return of Mexican migrants is on the rise. Due to Trump's anti-immigration approach, he has released several executive actions which include the expanded use of detention for undocumented migrants, limits on access to asylum, enhanced enforcement along the Mexico-USA border (including the construction of a 2,000 mile border wall), restrictions for 'sanctuary'¹⁹ jurisdictions receiving federal grants, suspension of the issuance of visas to nationals from six countries²⁰, and the most recently, the threat to end DACA. At this point it is hard to predict how the current circumstances will affect the lives of millions of Mexican immigrants and US-citizens of Mexican origin, but consequences will definitely include more 'voluntarily', compelled and forced returns from the USA to a country where support for returnees has been almost non-existent and which has proved to be ill-equipped for their reintegration.

1.2. Contexts and migration patterns in Huaquechula and Mexico City

The selection of sites for this research was influenced by Masferrer and Roberts' (2012) recommendation of conducting studies in non-traditional emigration areas²¹ with high levels of return. While this thesis is not explicitly comparative in nature, in order to address how contexts of return shape returnees' reintegration experiences differently, the research was conducted in two contrasting localities, the rural municipality of Huaquechula in the state of Puebla, and Mexico City (see Figure 1).

Huaquechula is a rural middle-sized *municipio* (municipality) of about 30,000 habitants of whom a majority identify themselves as *mestizos*²² and a very small number as indigenous. The main economic activities in Huaquechula are farming (mainly for subsistence)²³, agricultural wage labour, itinerant trade, circular labour migration to nearby

¹⁹ These are USA cities that follow certain measures that protect undocumented migrants. The most significant measure is that they do not permit municipal funds or resources to be applied in furtherance of enforcement of federal immigration laws.

²⁰ Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen.

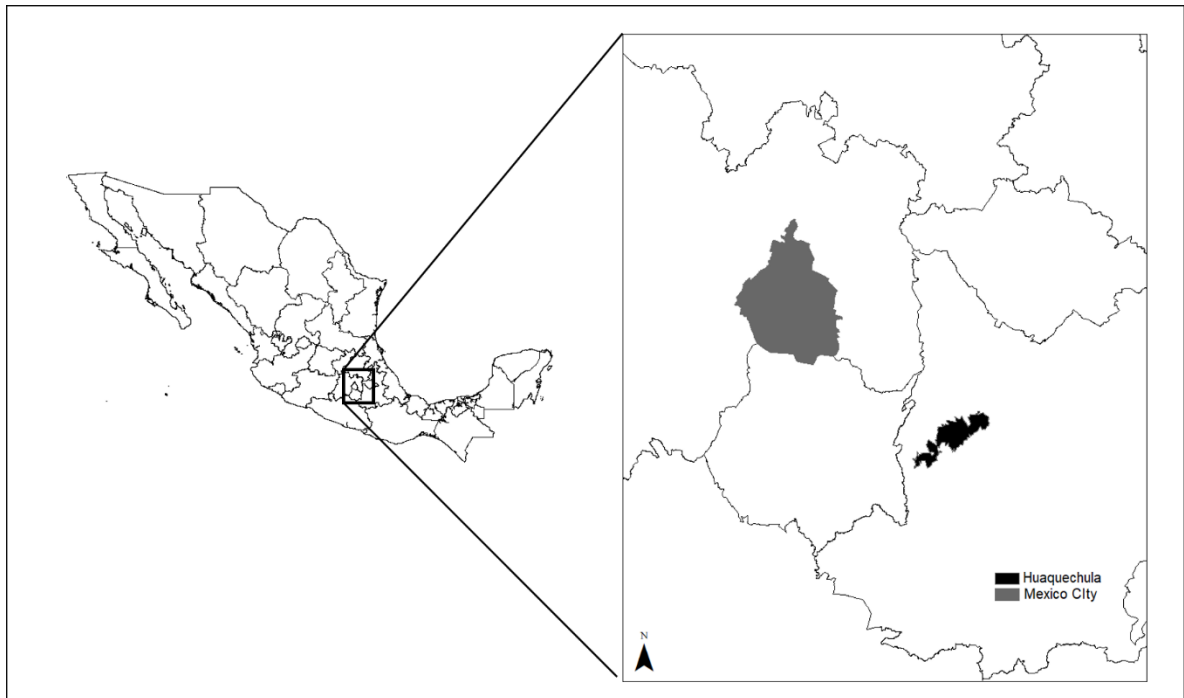
²¹ Scholars define as 'traditional states of migration' those Western states with well-established and long-standing migration outflows, including return. The states considered under this category are Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, San Luis Potosi and Zacatecas (Tuirán et al. 2002). 'Non-traditional states of migration' are others not in this list, with relatively recent migration outflows to the USA, such as Mexico City, Oaxaca and Puebla, among others. One of the most significant differences is that in the case of the traditional states, we can see a more documented return, in comparison to the return to the non-traditional states.

²² In the Mexican context, a *mestizo* is a person of mixed ethnic ancestry, specifically, of indigenous and Spanish descent.

²³ Raising crops such as beans, corn, peanuts and sorghum.

cities, and emigration to the USA. Participants made frequent reference to the importance of local traditions, including the celebrations of *la Santa Cruz* (day of the Holy Cross), but especially, the *Día de Muertos* (Death's day) highlighting that, in addition to their cultural and social relevance, these celebrations attract tourists to the town, which represents a good source of income for its residents. Huaquechula has been considered by the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (SEDESOL - Ministry of Social Development) as a municipality with high levels of social exclusion where approximately 80 percent of its population is considered to live in poverty (CONEVAL 2010). Furthermore, according to data from the UNDP (2014), the region which Huaquechula is part of (Atlixco and Matamoros Valley) is considered the most unequal within the state of Puebla.

Figure 1. Huaquechula, Puebla and Mexico City



Source: INEGI 2015

For most of the 20th century, the main geographic origins of Mexican migrants were rural areas in the centre-west region of the country (Durand et al. 2001). While there is some evidence that (very) few migrants from the state of Puebla and Mexico City joined the Bracero Programme, it was not until after the 1970s that the proportion of migrants coming from non-traditional states of migration, including urban centres, increased. Particularly in

the case of Puebla, D'Aubeterre (2000) shows that between 1980 and 2000 the international migration rate increased 26 times, while migration to other municipalities in the country increased only four times. This unprecedented increase in migration to the USA is related to the decline of the rural economy and the collapse of urban wages and employment (Binford 2003; Cordero-Díaz 2004; Marroni 2000). Cordero- Díaz (2004) has a very similar finding for the case of the municipality of Huaquechula, which since the late 1980s has developed a sustained 'mass migration' flow. As we will see throughout this thesis, migration has had a significant impact in this community of just 25,000 habitants (CONEVAL 2010). The municipality of Huaquechula is considered to have a 'very high intensity migration rate'²⁴, positioning it as number six out of 217 municipalities that comprise the state of Puebla. Migrants from Huaquechula have as their main destination New York City, the neighbouring state of New Jersey and Los Angeles²⁵.

With regard to Mexico City, this is a densely populated city with almost nine million habitants²⁶, of which approximately 10 percent identify themselves as indigenous and another small number as internal and foreign immigrants (INEGI 2015). As the country's capital, the main economic activities in Mexico City are financial and tourism services, industrial activity and informal trade. Mexico City is no exception to the deep social inequalities people suffer in the country. Trendy neighbourhoods and affluent suburbs often stand surrounded by slums and vast belts of abject poverty where there is not even access to basic services; yet areas remain segregated from each other in every way imaginable. Despite this, Mexico City has been considered by the SEDESOL as a territory with a

²⁴ The Índice Absoluto de Intensidad Migratoria (IAIM - Absolute Immigration Intensity Index) considers the demographic and socioeconomic dimensions of international migration of a locality. It is a measure that summarizes the migratory characteristics of Mexican households in terms of remittances, migrants living in the USA, those who have a circular migration pattern, and return migrants. Likewise, it classifies the geographic regions into strata of very low, low, medium, high and very high migratory intensity (CONAPO 2010).

²⁵ According to D'Aubeterre Buznego and Rivermar Pérez (2007) migration flows from Puebla to United States started as early as 1940s but became massive during the 1980s. One of the earliest flows migrated to California under the hospice of the *Programa Bracero* where people from rural communities such as San Miguel Acuexcomac were recruited to work in agriculture. The other important flow was to Nueva York and New Jersey some of the first documented cases worked in the manufacture sector and in restaurants (Smith 2001).

²⁶ The *Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México* (ZMVM - Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico) is an agglomeration that incorporates 18 additional municipalities from other states (e.g. Estado de Mexico). The ZMVM has a population of over 20 million, making it the largest metropolitan area in North America.

moderate degree of social exclusion where approximately 30 percent of its population is considered to live in poverty (CONEVAL 2010).

In relation to its emigration patterns to the USA, researchers have also found an increase of migrants crossing the northern border starting from 1980. In 1984 CONAPO (Mexican National Population Council) conducted a survey of undocumented migrants living in the USA and found that 5.1 percent were coming from Mexico City and Estado de México (ZMVM). By 1992, the number had increased to 9.4 percent and by 2000 to 12 percent (Lozano-Asencio 2004). While this appears to be a large figure, this number still represents a small percentage of the ZMVM total population. When looking specifically at Mexico City, according to the local government's data, there are almost 600,000 emigrants in the USA. Therefore it is considered a state with a 'very low intensity migration rate'. Contrary to Huaquechula, migrants from Mexico City have several USA destinations, the most relevant being the states of California, Texas, Illinois, and New York²⁷.

1.3. Research questions

I embarked on this study with a rather vague and very broad question in mind: How do return migrants experience their life back in Mexico? While extensive and imprecise, this question already included the main aspects of a more detailed research interest: Mexican returnees, reintegration and personal experiences. After conducting an initial literature review I decided to approach integration as a multi-dimensional process. Therefore my initial research question was: How do return migrants experience reintegration at macro, meso and micro levels?

The realisation and confirmation gained through fieldwork that the reintegration experiences of returned migrants are shaped by an extremely diverse range of factors started the process of adapting my research questions from those concerned initially with specific levels of integration (macro, meso and micro) to a more explorative approach.

²⁷ Although the Mexican Government statistics seem to indicate that Mexico City was an important provider of international migrants during the *Programa Bracero*, the city functioned mostly as a transit point for rural-origin migrants from the central region of Mexico. It was not until the twentieth century, when Mexico City's population grew, government policies called for the decentralisation of public and private enterprises, new industries were prohibited in the Valley of Mexico, the 1985 earthquake, together with growing inequality, environmental degradation, and public safety concerns, that the international migration grew towards localities in the USA where people found work in the service sector and manufacturing industry.

Therefore this thesis is informed and shaped by three overall questions which are a synthesis and elaboration of my initial guiding question, insights from the literature on return-migration factors, and unfolding perspectives from the fieldwork as it progressed. The first two questions refer to observable phenomena:

1. What factors shape returnees' (re)integration experiences?

Implicit within this question are the following two sub-questions:

- i) How do individual aspects such as gender, life course, education, occupation and contexts of return (including their structural constraints) shape the (re)integration experiences of migrants?
- ii) How do the motivations and characteristics of the pre-return, return and post-return movements affect the (re)integration experience?

2. How do migrants experience and interpret their (re)integration process?

The third question is more conceptual and my response to it is based on my analysis and interpretation of my data related to the first two questions:

3. What are the implications of these questions for our understandings of return migration and the (re)integration experience of migrants in their country of origin?

The overall aim of this thesis is to use the example of Mexican return migrants to contribute to the ongoing scholarly dialogue about reintegration, looking at post-return experiences in two contrasting locations, one rural and one urban.

1.4. Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters in addition to the Introduction. Chapter 2 outlines the literature that has informed this thesis, particularly around return migration and integration, and indicates how I have understood these concepts for the purposes of this study. After dissecting the concept of return, its typologies and its attendant literature, I discuss how reintegration is a multi-dimensional process that is influenced by numerous key aspects, among them migrants' individual characteristics (gendered life course, education, and occupation) and contextual aspects (including structural constraints) in their places of return, as well as pre-return, return and post-return experiences. Additionally, I introduce how the

notions of return and reintegration have been considered in the existing body of literature addressing the Mexican case. In the last section of this chapter I introduce the '(re)integration framework' developed for my analysis of this case study.

Chapter 3 provides details about how I approached fieldwork and the methods for data collection. I outline why I chose Huaquechula and Mexico City as research field sites and how I gained access to research participants. I describe the data collection techniques I used (questionnaire survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews, interviews with key informants, focus groups and field notes), and how I interpreted the research materials these techniques produced. The last section of Chapter 3 outlines some ethical considerations. This also incorporates my personal approach and positionality as an advocate of migrants' rights, a migrant, a practitioner, a researcher and a pregnant woman.

The succeeding four chapters present my empirical findings, and are roughly chronologically sequenced, following the migrants on their migration and return trajectories: to and in the USA, the motivations for return, the macro-scale contexts of return, and the experiences of reintegration. Looking at them in a bit more detail, here is what Chapters 4 to 7 cover.

Chapter 4 focuses on the emigration experience of Mexican migrants in the USA. In the first section of this chapter I introduce the participants' characteristics at the time of the movement, their journeys, their motivations and/or pressures to migrate, and expectations of their lives in the USA. In a second moment, I discuss my participants' integration experience through the elements proposed in the '(re)integration framework'. Differences between and within groups (based on gendered life course, education, occupation and place of return) are highlighted throughout the chapter. This chapter suggests that, despite the extent to which participants were able and willing to integrate into American society, their experiences were often overshadowed by two main constraints, their undocumented status and their obligations with their next of kin on both sides of the border.

Chapter 5 looks into the return experiences of the participants. Through this chapter I develop an overall understanding of Mexican migrants' motivations to return to their country of origin or to stay in the USA, and I look at the differences between temporary and 'permanent' returns. I then elaborate on the main narratives of return introduced in Chapter 2 which reflect various degrees of agency in the decision-making process. Lastly I introduce key aspects of the decision-making process, preparations, and journeys followed by a discussion about geographies of return, and returnees' expectations of their post-return

lives. The diversity in Mexicans' return motivations/pressures introduced through this chapter highlights the need to be cautious with generalisations about Mexican returnees'.

Chapter 6 presents the contexts of return in Mexico. I analyse how contextual aspects at a macro level, such as norms and policies developed in countries and localities of return, as well as socio-economic and cultural factors, can become structural constraints and influence return migrants' ability to reintegrate. To do this I draw together secondary materials to provide evidence and I build on this information by using key informants' and migrants' interviews to better describe how these contexts have shaped and influenced the participants' reintegration experiences differently in Huaquechula and Mexico City.

Chapter 7 focuses on the reintegration experiences of the participants in their localities of return and I do this through the analysis of the four dimensions proposed in the framework, namely (i) the reintegration dimension; (ii) contextual aspects (including structural constraints); (iii) returnees' characteristics (gendered life course, education and occupation); and (iv) pre-return, return and post-return experiences. In a second section of this chapter I analyse participants' own assessment of their human wellbeing and how this assessment influences their future aspirations. The chapter ends by looking into returnees' contributions to their communities of return. I suggest that despite Mexican returnees' lives appearing to be functional in many ways, the impossibility of achieving their aim of *vivir mejor* (living well) upon return often makes them aspire to re-migrate.

The thesis concludes with Chapter 8, which draws together the empirical material in the preceding chapters to discuss responses to the research questions outlined above. In particular, I summarise what fieldwork with return migrants in the two localities of return and the use of the proposed framework can tell us about the reintegration experience of Mexican returnees, and I argue that the use of a multi-dimensional and multi-causal framework which incorporates returnees' own assessment of their human wellbeing is necessary to broaden our understanding of this migration experience. I end the thesis by discussing some policy implications, followed by outlining some of the strengths and weaknesses of this study, including suggesting some aspects that may require further research.

2. Return migration and reintegration

As summarised in Chapter 1, the current context of the Mexico-USA migration flows is characterised by adverse economic, social and political circumstances in the USA, an increase in the number of migrants removed from USA territory, the highest costs and risks to date for migrants who attempt irregular border crossings, as well as the slowdown in Mexican emigration (undocumented migration in particular) and its circular pattern. This situation highlights the need to improve our understanding of migrants' reintegration process which is recognised as one of the main effects of return; a historic yet neglected aspect of the Mexico-USA migration system (Canales 2012; Durand 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the reintegration process of Mexican migrants returning from the USA to two contrasting locations in the central region of Mexico. Furthermore, in order to better understand returnees' reintegration experience, this analysis incorporates participants' own perceptions of their wellbeing and how these perceptions influence their future aspirations. This approach shifts attention away from the material aspects of the reintegration process (which have been the main focus of the existing literature on Mexican migrants' reintegration), towards an acknowledgment of the significance of migrants' human wellbeing (material, perceptual and relational) while conducting research in this field.

This chapter draws out the key concepts, and the connections between them, which have shaped my approach to the proposed research questions and my understanding of this case study. I firstly consider the concept of return, beginning with a review of how this migration movement has been represented in existing literature, and later proposing a revision of these representations in relation to the different migration theories. This section is followed by a discussion of the 'forced vs voluntary' typology due to its relevance to this research. I then proceed to elaborate on the understandings and debates surrounding integration, the other key concept of this thesis. The notion of integration is extended to consider migrants' adaptation processes in both their receiving country and their country of origin as they return to it (reintegration). Lastly, I introduce literature which explores the dynamics between return migration and reintegration and their implications for migrants' human wellbeing. I end this chapter providing a conceptual framing of the reintegration process for this case study. It is important to note that throughout this chapter I will explore how the notions of return and reintegration have been considered in the existing body of literature that addresses the Mexican case.

2.1. What do we know about return migration?

Return migration is a multi-faceted, heterogeneous and long-standing sub-process of the migration cycle, which is a relatively new subject of study (King 2017). Despite the fact that Ravenstein acknowledged the principle of return migration as early as 1885 in his study 'The laws of migration', the first return migration studies that can be identified as such are from the late 1960s and early 1970s by authors such as Bovenkerk (1975), Cerase (1974), Davison (1968) and King (1977). More recently, return migration has become a growing area of study, particularly in light of increasingly stringent policies such as those related to the forced removals of undocumented migrants (Coutin 2014; de Genova and Peutz 2010; Hasselberg 2013, 2014; Miller 2008; van Hear 1998), the end of significant refugee crises worldwide (Black and Koser 1999; Ghanem 2003; Gladwell et al. 2016; Long and Oxfeld 2004; Markowitz and Stefansson 2004) and a growing approach that links return to transnationalism (Carling and Erdal 2014; Conway and Potter 2007; De Bree et al. 2010) and development (Ammassari and Black 2001; Cassarino 2004; Davids and van Houte 2008; King 1986, 2000; Sørensen 2011).

Moreover, this literature has expanded considerably since the 1990s and has been either funded by governments or conducted by non-governmental organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or academic institutions. These bodies have increasingly placed the return and reintegration of 'failed' asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants at the top of the agenda (see Coutin 2014; Collyer 2012; Hasselberg 2013; Koch 2014; Noll 1999). While there are important studies, the majority of them being empirical and, to a lesser extent, theoretical (King 2000; see also Carling et al. 2011), the return migration field is one that requires further research. This is particularly so in the case of understudied countries in the Global South with significant migration flows and long histories of economic migration, such as Mexico, and the specific communities that have been shaped by the tradition of migration.

King has defined return migration as "the process whereby people return to their country or place of origin after a significant period in another country or region" (2000:8). While useful, this definition requires further discussion regarding place and time for its use in this research. In terms of place, a return can no longer be considered the end of the migration trajectory as, while a migrant may have returned to their country of origin, it is highly probable that the return represents one phase of a repeated cycle of migration, as returnees often

lead increasingly mobile lives. As we will later learn through this research, it is common that, upon return, migrants re-migrate to another locality which differs to their place of origin, and many others who are unable to relocate yearn to do so (Kuschminder 2017; Masferrer 2014). With regard to time, there is debate as to how long one must be abroad to be considered a migrant, and thus a return migrant. For example, the United Nations defines a return migrant as an individual who has been abroad for at least 12 months. Alternatively, there is also an argument that a period of three months can be viewed as significant enough to be considered as a migration episode, particularly in terms of circular or seasonal migration (Ammassari and Black 2001; Kuschminder 2017:16). As previously mentioned, there is an increment in the number of Mexican returnees who have spent longer periods of time in the USA. Therefore, following Massey and his colleagues' criteria, this research uses the participant selection criteria of an individual having spent at least three uninterrupted years abroad and one year in the country of origin upon return in order to be interviewed (1987:308-309).

Return migration takes many shapes and forms, therefore a variety of typologies have been used to attempt to understand the complex and multiple processes that take place when migrants leave their different destinations to return to their 'home'²⁸ countries. Some of these classifications are based on criteria such as temporality (e.g. occasional, periodic, seasonal, temporary or permanent returns); levels of development of the countries involved in the migration processes (e.g. return from north to north, from south to south, from south to north, and from north to south); the people who go back (e.g. first, 1.5 or second generation); or intended behaviour and final migration outcome (e.g. imagined or 'myth of return' vs. the reality of return). Furthermore, return migration has also been classified based on characteristics such as 'voluntary' or forced, and within these typologies, organised or spontaneous (Cassarino 2004; Ghosh 2000; Gmelch 1980, 1983; King 1977, 2000; van Hear 1998). These typologies are, at the same time, intimately related to migrants' motivations to return and to various factors that influence their 'homecomings', including their agency (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey et al. 2014). For the purpose of this research I will focus on the 'voluntary-forced' typology which will be discussed later in this

²⁸ For the purpose of this thesis I will use the terms 'home' and 'homeland' when referring to country of origin. In these cases, I will use quotation marks as I am not always aware to what extent the terms 'home' and 'homeland' represent migrants' sense of belonging.

chapter, and will be subsequently used in this thesis to analyse if the different types of return influence the reintegration experience of Mexican migrants.

An early attempt to analyse the complex process of return, the various factors which influence it, and its impact on the origin country, was the work done by Cerase (1974). In his research on Italian return migration from the USA, Cerase identified four types of return migration: the return of failure, the return of conservatism, the return of innovation and the return of retirement. An important aspect of Cerase's model of return migration is that it recognises the importance of the interplay between migrants' return motivations and life expectations, and he linked these aspects to how they influence migrants' integration processes in both the home and host countries (Cassarino 2004:258). In other words, Cerase provides an important example of how crucial returnees' subjectivities (e.g. motivations and life expectations) are, and how they shape migrants' return and reintegration experiences. Cerase's typology of returnees also constitutes an attempt to show that contextual factors in countries of origin need to be taken into account as a prerequisite to understanding the reasons why migrants are able (or not) to reintegrate and contribute to the development of their societies upon their return. These two aspects, context in the country of origin and returnees' subjectivities, are highly relevant for this study and will be analysed empirically in Chapters 6 and 7.

Another significant aspect that has been reflected upon when studying return motivations is the temporal dimension. A migrant's age at the time of the movement and length of stay in the country of settlement are aspects that have been addressed by various researchers (Cassarino 2004; King 2000). Conversely, individual gender life course²⁹ events – such as the birth or raising of children, taking care of elderly parents, or retirement – have been overlooked while studying migrants' return motivations (Erdal and Ezzati 2015:1204). In this regard, the chances of return are heavily related to the number of people who 'depend' on the person in question at different stages of life (Erdal and Ezzati 2015:1212). Furthermore, findings have shown that desires to return are different for males and females. According to Bujan (2015,) for women return is confined to the family life cycle and to the challenges coming from the process of care arranging; that is, it is linked to tensions arising from the family arrangements made both to manage everyday life and for social reproduction

²⁹ Just to be clear and to remind the reader, I repeat here Wright's (2018) key definition of the term 'gendered life course' as referring to the social constructedness of different 'ages' which are not always biologically and sequentially ordered but can also include 'critical life junctures' and how the lives of men and women are linked by gendered power structures.

negotiated before departure. In contrast, for men return is linked to economic expectations and their role as providers in their homes of origin. As will become evident later in this thesis, gendered life course aspects (such as number of dependents and family roles) have had a significant impact on the decisions to return of my research participants.

Despite the large return migration flows all over the world (IOM 2013:80), it is important to acknowledge that the decision and process of returning home are highly complex and problematic. In some cases, despite the desire to return, due to the existing social, economic and political conditions, the return may be neither possible nor convenient (Long and Oxfeld 2004:1), particularly when the state or place of origin proves to be unsafe and unwelcoming. While still few, some empirical studies that have been highly useful for understanding the counterintuitive process of returning from developed to developing countries are those from Ecuador (Boccagni 2011), Morocco (De Bree et al. 2010), Nigeria (Balaram and Pennington 2013), Senegal (Sinatti 2011), Central American countries (Berger-Cardoso et al. 2014; Moran-Taylor and Menjivar 2005), and the Caribbean (Conway and Potter 2007; Miller 2008). It is worth highlighting that while this literature addresses various social, economic or political aspects of the lives of returnees in developing countries, little work can be identified that specifically studies the reintegration experience of returnees in a 'holistic' way by reviewing the different notions explored above (type and places of return, motivations and temporality).

2.1.1. How is return migration represented in migration theory?

Theoretical work developed in relation to return migration has been primarily linked to classical theories of migration such as neoclassical economics, new economics of labour migration (NELM), structuralism, transnationalism and social-network theory (Cassarino 2004; Massey et al. 1993). Cassarino, among other authors (see also King 2012; Miller 2008), analysed these different theories and developed a framework to understand the diverse aspects of the return phenomenon including migrants' motivations for return, their role as returnees in their home communities, and the contributions they make to development through their financial and human capital. While Cassarino (2004) analyses and contrasts these theories extensively, it will be impossible to incorporate in detail the main postulates, contributions and flaws of each theory here due to the length limitations of this chapter; however, in order to understand the return migration phenomenon and its theoretical framework I will address the broad contributions of each theory.

Neoclassical theories are based on the idea that migration decisions are made primarily on financial calculations (Massey et al. 1993). Specifically, return is seen by neoclassical theory as the result of a miscalculation of costs, and therefore as a failure. According to the neoclassical rationale, migrants who manage to succeed are those that stay in the host country enjoying the benefits of the wage differential, and those who have very limited human and financial resources are the ones who return, which might represent a challenge for their reintegration (Cassarino 2004; Durand 2004; Massey et al. 2015:1019). Conversely, the NELM views return migration as the logical outcome of a 'calculated strategy' defined at the level of the migrant's household (Massey et al. 2015:1019). Therefore, return can be considered as a successful achievement of the goals or target established previous to departure. This theory proposes that, as there is a strategy in place, migrants have calculated the acquisition and accumulation of sufficient resources to guarantee a successful return. While both theories consider that migrants' motivations for both migration and return are based on economic factors, the neoclassical and NELM approaches differ in so far as they introduce contrasting sets of interpretations regarding return migration intimately related to their main postulates. The main criticism of these two theories is that they fail to consider a larger set of contextual factors at 'home' and in host countries such as social, economic and political matters and the role of the state in shaping migration flows in practice (Cassarino 2004:257; Constant and Massey 2002; Massey et al. 2015:1039). Additionally, as highlighted by Erdal and Ezzati (2015:1213), these theories fail to consider relevant aspects such as changing obligations to 'significant others' in relation to gender roles and life course. Accordingly, I will now present other theories which incorporate a broader set of factors into the analysis.

Structural theory takes various factors into consideration in its analysis of return migration. For the structural theorists, return appears to be guided by the opportunities that migrants expect to find in their 'home' countries but also by the opportunities already offered in their respective host countries. Cassarino (2004) uses Cerase's model, presented above, to exemplify a theory that considers how situational and structural factors influence the return experience. This model proposes that pre-defining returnees as failed or successful is impossible, as this depends on the interplay of many factors such as human and financial capital, power relations and networks, time and space, as well as traditions and values in locations of return. In this theory, success or failure upon return will be determined by migrants' level of adjustment into their communities. In particular, researchers argue that

migrants' sociodemographic characteristics and experience (e.g. age at migration, time spent abroad, education, skills acquired and job experiences), and the geographical space that they return to influence their ability to successfully adjust upon their return (Cassarino 2004; Erdal and Ezzati 2015; King 2000). As Cerase's typologies exemplify, migrants' capability to understand and adjust to the dynamics in home communities often lead to a more successful reintegration upon return and increased ability to contribute to the development of their country, or at least to improve the livelihoods of their household (Ammassari and Black 2001). Conversely, migrants' inability to understand and adjust often leads to high levels of frustration and re-migration intentions.

One of the main contributions of transnationalism theory is that it highlights the strong social and economic links between migrants and their host and 'home' communities. Regarding return migration, transnationalism theory considers that return is not the end of the migration cycle as the transnational experience is sustained either by the identities or movements of migrants and their communities, therefore there is no need for the adjustment suggested by structural theory in either place (Cassarino 2004:261). Important factors that are considered to lead to a successful return include maintaining strong relations with others of common ethnicity or common origin and kinship (commonly termed 'the diaspora') through regular contact, including back and forth movements between their host and origin countries. This theory highlights the importance of migrants' documented status and the relation between migrants and nation-states (including their institutions), highlighting that these interactions might position migrants in a better economic, political and social standing upon their return due to the investment of economic and social remittances (see Bakker 2010; Carling and Erdal 2014; Castles and Delgado-Wise 2007:3; Iaria 2014; King and Christou 2014).

Lastly, the social-network theory views migrants as actors who gather the resources needed to secure and prepare their return to the 'homeland' by mobilising resources available within their networks (Cassarino 2004:265). Moreover, according to this theory, the migration of one person within a social network creates a potential motivation for reunion among those left behind (especially within families who have been forcibly separated) but also generates social capital that other network members may draw upon to reduce their costs and risks of movement, motivating some of them to return, thereby expanding the network further to promote a self-feeding cycle of human mobility (Massey et al. 2014:1018).

With regard to the case of Mexican-USA return migration, Jorge Durand (2004) coined the hypothesis of *rendimiento decreciente* (diminishing returns theory) which is based on Piore's dual labour market theory (1979). Durand argues that many long-term migrants living in the USA take the decision to return to Mexico once they realise (i) the comparative wage advantage is not as great as before, (ii) they have reached a 'glass ceiling' and encounter the difficulty of achieving upward mobility by being confined to the secondary labour market which is characterised by low earnings, job impermanence, and low returns to education or experience, or (iii) their physical performance begins to decline with their advanced age. Therefore, if after the evaluation of the psychosocial and economic costs of staying in the USA the migrant realises that these are higher than the benefits, people usually prefer to return 'home' to enjoy a better quality of life and higher social status than that which they had while living abroad.

These theories highlight not only the multi-faceted nature of the return migration phenomenon but also encourage discussion of how the type of return (e.g. as the result of miscalculation or as an end of a project) influences the post-return phase and migrants' opportunities of reintegration. In short, some of these theories acknowledge that return has important cultural, economic, political and social consequences for communities and individuals which may facilitate or hinder migrants' reintegration experiences.

While these theories have been used to inform my fieldwork and analysis of the data, it is important to acknowledge that they do not consider any differences between 'voluntary' and forced return (Miller 2012:133) and fail to capture the reality of those migrants who are forced to return, and for whom return as the result of a calculated strategy is not an option. New policies and enforcement practices in the context of the USA create new 'contexts of return', a situation that offers opportunities to refine analytically and empirically this component of the return migration process (Medina and Menjívar 2015:2125). The results of this study aim to improve our understandings of return migration from the USA and the reintegration experiences of migrants in Mexico, and aim to contribute to the development of the above-mentioned theories, taking into consideration the particularities of this case study.

2.1.2. Introducing the concepts of 'voluntary' and forced return

As mentioned earlier, return migration has been classified based on characteristics such as voluntary or forced along a spectrum of returns (Cassarino 2008; King 2000; Miller 2008; van Hear 1998). Broadly speaking, 'voluntary' generally refers to situations in which the

migrant returns under his or her free will, and 'forced' refers to the migrant being removed involuntarily (deported), typically by immigration authorities from the host country. However, it can be argued that return can never be voluntary when there is no plausible (documented) way in which to stay in the host/new 'home' country (van Houte and Davids 2008:1413). While no sanctions may have been imposed on the migrant nor force used against them, it is questionable whether return under the threat of force and sanctions can still be called voluntary. Van Hear defines forced return as "individuals or communities compelled, obliged or induced to move when otherwise they would choose to stay put; the force involved may be direct, overt, focused or indirect, covert and diffuse" (1998:10). Cassarino adds another useful category to this typology, compelled return, which refers to someone who returns to his/her country of origin as a result of circumstances and factors which interrupt their migration cycle (2008:113). Circumstances could include life events such as marriage, taking care of elderly parents, raising children, or any other event that may modify migrants' migration trajectories.

Van Hear (1998) accurately highlights that migrants' return movements have certain degrees of choice and coercion, which cannot be represented using a simplistic 'voluntary-forced' dichotomy (see also Collyer 2012; Koch 2013; Webber 2011). For example, if a migrant is compelled to return home due to personal reasons, such as the inability to cope with the emotional distress of being away from family, or due to gendered life course constraints, such as the need for a man who is the eldest of his siblings, the need to return to provide financial resources, for the care of a sick parent. Moreover, if a migrant decides to return to the home country because of structural constraints, such as the inability to obtain a work permit or to feel safe due to the enforcement of immigration laws (e.g. raids to detain and deport undocumented migrants) in the host communities, it can be contested that this type of return is voluntary. As these examples suggest, the only way a return could be considered as truly voluntary is if the person could access proper documentation, information, support and thereby has the freedom of choosing to stay or return.

The problematisation of forced and voluntary return is highly relevant to this research due to the nature of the border crossing patterns between Mexico and the USA, and the complexity of the life experiences of the trans-border population. Therefore, for the purposes of this research I will use the following typology to analyse the return patterns of Mexican migrants from the USA:

- i) Voluntary return: decision to return is driven by the culmination of the migration cycle or project. It is defined by the absence of any physical, psychological, or material pressure on the migrant. Voluntary return will often encompass willingness and readiness to return, including mobilisation of resources and the acquisition of immigration status in the host country; e.g. the migrant decides to return 'home' after obtaining citizenship of the host country, fulfilling the objective of building a house and saving enough to start a business in his/her community of origin.
- ii) Compelled return due to personal reasons and gendered life course constraints: this situation is defined by the presence of (mental) health matters, and/or psychological or material pressure on the migrant related to gender, cultural or family matters among others; e.g. a migrant woman decides to return 'home' due to the need to be reunited with her children who remained under the care of a relative, and who cannot join her in the USA.
- iii) Compelled return due to structural constraints: decision to return is driven by structural reasons related to the state policies or the consequences of those policies. It is defined by the presence of physical, psychological, or material pressure on the migrant by the state or society; e.g. the migrant decides to return 'home' due to the need to continue with higher education which the migrant does not have access to in the USA.
- iv) Forced return: the return is involuntary, and it is performed with support of either the 'home' or host state. For the purpose of this research, this term will include 'voluntary departure'³⁰ and 'administrative removal'³¹ of a migrant from the USA due to lack of possession of a residency permit, working in breach of their conditions of residence or as a consequence of being charged with criminal offences. This return will include either an administrative or judicial procedure prior to leaving the host country which, in many cases, includes spending time in detention.

³⁰ 'Voluntary departure' is a process whereby a migrant's request is approved (usually one made during removal proceedings, due to either undocumented presence or another reason for removability) to be granted the opportunity of voluntary departure rather than removal from the USA. This procedure permits the migrant to remain in the USA territory for some time (up to 120 days) before having to leave the country (Baker and Williams 2015).

³¹ 'Administrative removal' is a process whereby a migrant that has been convicted of an aggravated felony (including undocumented border crossing) and who did not have USA lawful permanent resident status at the time he/she was detained, is removed. Migrants are generally not entitled to appear before an immigration judge or to be considered for administrative relief.

While these categories represent an attempt to better understand the differences within the ‘voluntary-forced’ return spectrum, the experiences of the research participants demonstrate that motivations, degrees of agency exercised and reasons for return are multiple and as diverse as those that inform the migrants’ decisions to migrate. Furthermore, the decision to return is influenced by more than complex and convoluted reasons which make difficult to assign them to one or another category. Therefore, I acknowledge that these four typologies are an ‘imposed’ categorisation used to attempt to better understand return migrants’ realities while not entirely representing them.

2.2. What do we know about migrants returning from the USA to Mexico?

If Mexican migration to the USA, as well the characteristics of its flow, has been extensively studied, the process of return has received much less scholarly attention. Some of the main topics addressed by the body of existing literature available are:

i) Migrants’ intentions and reasons for return (Arriola Vega 2013; Canales 2012; Durand 2004; Fix et al. 2009; González-Barrera 2015; Hagan et al. 2008; Horton 2013; Horton and Cole 2011; Lindstrom 1996; Massey et al. 1987; Ravuri 2014; Reagan and Olsen 2000; Rendall et al. 2011; Reyes 1997; Ruíz-Tagle and Wong 2009; Zahniser 1999); ii) Experiences of return (Anderson 2013; Anderson and Solís 2014; Cornelius et al. 2009; Durand and Silva 1996; Fernández-Guzmán 2009; Hamann et al. 2008; Landa 2014; Pombo 2010; Rosete 2012; Smith 2006; Waddell and Fontenla 2015); iii) Returnees characteristics, including geographies of return (Canales 1999; Escobar et al. 2013; Gandini et al. 2015; López 2012; Masferrer and Roberts 2012; Mestries 2013, 2015; Montoya-Arce et al. 2011; Passel et al. 2012; Rothstein 2016; Ullman et al. 2011; Velasco and Coubes 2013); iv) Reintegration experiences, primarily focused on job access and economic development (Alba et al. 2010; Anguiano-Téllez et al. 2013; Borges et al. 2013; Cobo et al. 2010; García-Acevedo 2003; Gitter et al. 2008; Medina 2016; Medina and Menjívar 2015; Montoya-Arce et al. 2011; Prickett et al. 2012; Rivera-Sánchez 2011, 2013; Román and Hamann 2014; Ross et al. 2004; Sánchez-García et al. 2012; Sheehan and Riosmena 2013; Velasco and Albicker 2013; Williams 2017); v) How policies influence return migration and reintegration (Astor 2009; Durand et al. 2001; Hernández 2006; López 2012; Massey et al. 2015; Rodríguez and Hagan 2004).

The above-cited literature has been focused primarily on rural communities in the traditional sending states of the *Centro-Occidente* (Midwest). Fewer research studies have focused on urban sites, such as Estado de México and Mexico City, or rural areas in new states of migration, such as Veracruz, which introduces us to a different perspective (see Anderson 2015; Anderson and Solís 2014; Mestries 2014; Montoya-Arce et al. 2011; Rothstein 2016).

While there have been other significant moments in the history of return migration from the USA to Mexico (see Chapter 1), the literature found on return migration prior to 2008 was minimal. Based on the assumption that Mexico could face a massive return of migrants due to the Global Financial Crisis, and fearful of the impact of returnees on the fragile Mexican labour structure, researchers have directed their attention to this group (Canales 2012; Montoya-Arce et al. 2011). Additionally, the increased number of removals from the USA and the consequences of these removals have drawn researchers to this topic.

Much of the current literature on return migration to Mexico is from quantitative disciplines (see Alba et al. 2010; Lindstrom 1996; Masferrer and Roberts 2012; Massey et al. 2015; Passel et al. 2012) that approach the phenomenon from a macro perspective through census and demographic surveys (mainly from the Mexican Migration Project). This type of research often presents migrants as an aggregated segment of the population, and rarely looks beyond their experiences as economic migrants, thereby overlooking their subjective experiences. Important return research asserts that decisions about return often are more closely related to family or other non-economic considerations, than to economic calculations (King 2000). Therefore, Mexican returnees' experiences of 'homecoming' cannot and should not be oversimplified. I anticipate that this research can contribute to the current body of literature to better understand the contemporary returns of Mexican migrants to non-traditional states of migration and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences. In the following section, I will review what is known about the prevalence of the contemporary return migration to Mexico³² and consider some of what have been defined as the main characteristics of returnees. Aspects related to returnees' experiences of return and reintegration will be covered later in this chapter.

³² Focusing on the years between 2000 to 2015.

2.2.1. How many returnees live in Mexico?

While there are no accurate statistics (which is a major problem for policy makers), it is known that Mexico hosts a large number of returnees on both a temporary and permanent basis. What we do know is that, according to preliminary estimates from the Pew Research Center, approximately one million people left the USA for Mexico between 2009 and 2014 (González-Barrera 2015:7). From the Mexican side, Gandini and her colleagues, based on the Mexican census, report that the number of returnees has increased considerably from 267,000 in 2000, to 825,000 in 2010. This constitutes a more than threefold increase in 10 years (Gandini et al. 2015:75). With regard to forced returns, these authors assert that from 2009 to 2013, 3.8 million people have been removed from the USA, 71 percent (2.7 million) of whom were originally from Mexico. From this data, we can conclude that during a period of five years (2009 to 2014), an estimated 500,000 Mexican people have returned from the USA per year, either on a temporary or permanent basis (DHS 2014 in Gandini et al. 2015:147). Hence, the scale of the returns more than justifies my focus on return and reintegration in this thesis.

2.2.2. Why do emigrants return?

The literature shows that contextual and personal factors³³ are the primary influences on Mexico migrants' return to their country. Researchers have cited the relative proximity between the USA and communities of origin, and a strong preference for residence back 'home' rather than facing exclusion and discrimination in the host community as some of the contextual factors that trigger reinforce and perpetuate the return migration from the USA to Mexico (Cornelius 1976; Escobar and Martínez 1987; Massey et al. 1987; Mestries 2013; Reichert and Massey 1980). With regard to economic factors, it has been demonstrated that the Financial Crisis of 2008 did not trigger an exodus of Mexican migrants from the USA to Mexico, as was expected³⁴ (Fix et al. 2009). Rather, a number of studies have identified people returning due to temporary and badly remunerated migrant employment in the USA (Canales 2012; Fix et al. 2009). In addition, Lindstorm (1996) and Reyes (2001) have pinpointed the comparatively high purchasing power of those returnees with USA earnings in less prosperous areas of origin as other reason for return. Likewise, Massey and

³³ Mestries (2013) defines them as aspects linked to the environment and to the migrant.

³⁴ In fact, Rendall et al. (2011) assert that there was a decline in total return migration in the fourth quarter of 2008 (immediately after the start of the Global Financial Crisis) compared with the fourth quarter of 2007.

colleagues assert that migrants who have acquired a property in Mexico, either land or a house, tend to return more frequently (Massey et al. 2014; Ravuri 2014).

The enforcement of USA immigration policies that aim to deter undocumented migration have interesting and contradictory consequences. On the one hand, Rosenblum (in Massey et al. 2014:1017) highlights that the implementation of such measures, instead of reducing the number of departures from Mexico to the USA, has seen a decrease in the number of spontaneous voluntarily returns of undocumented migrants to Mexico, thereby creating a 'caging effect' where undocumented people are trapped in the USA as they are unable to go 'home' due to their fear of not being able to re-enter the USA (see also Riosmena 2004). Conversely, there are some researchers who disagree with Rosenblum arguing that these enforcement measures have triggered a significant number of forced returns by way of removals and 'voluntary departure' orders, as well as spontaneous 'voluntary' returns, during the recent years (Arriola-Vega 2014; González-Barrera 2015).

With regard to life course aspects, family commitments are identified in the literature as one of the most common reasons for return (Arriola-Vega 2014; González-Barrera 2015; Márquez et al. 2012; Papail and Arroyo 2004; Pries 2004; Serrano et al. 2015); however these studies lack a gender analysis. Additionally, Duncan (2015) highlights the cases of people who return due to their inability to cope with the structural vulnerability and "illegality" experienced while in the United States. Anderson explains what the return experience is like for those young migrants from the 1.5 generation who return due to their inability to fulfil the 'American dream' (2014). Other studies address what they have defined as diverse kinds of voluntary return. Various authors (De la Sierra 2013; Montoya-Arce et al. 2011; Ullman et al. 2011; Velasco et al. 2013) explore health-motivated returns and highlight some of the specific needs of this group³⁵. This return is related to the concept of *rendimiento decreciente* (diminishing returns theory) introduced earlier in this chapter by Durand (2004).

2.2.3. Who returns?

Migration, and return migration in particular, is a highly selective process which is affected by demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, education and occupation. Two

³⁵ As an example, some of the main health problems returned migrants reported were a higher prevalence of heart disease, emotional/psychiatric disorders, obesity, and smoking. Additionally, the authors' findings show that in 2008 nearly half a million returnees received medical treatment related to work injuries, complications from diabetes, HIV-AIDS and renal failure in Mexican hospitals.

other aspects which have a significant influence on return are place of origin and documented status. Each will now be considered in turn.

In terms of distribution, historically it has been found that a higher number of men than of women return to Mexico from the USA (Massey et al. 2015; Masferrer and Roberts 2012; Ravuri 2014; Reyes 2001; Velasco et al. 2013; Waddell and Fontenla 2015). In the Bracero era, this was an obvious consequence of the predominantly male emigration flow, but male migrants remain prevalent in the return flows today while the emigration stream has changed considerably in terms of gender. According to Gandini and colleagues, women composed more than 30 percent of the return flows in 2000. Despite overall return flows increasing by more than 200 percent by 2010, the percentage of female returnees decreased by six percentage points from 2000 to 2010 (Gandini et al. 2015). This is a common pattern that has been observed in other Latin American countries due to the higher levels of forced return experienced currently (Prieto and Koolhaas 2014). Researchers attribute the increased number of male returnees to several reasons, including the orientation of immigration (removal) policies in the USA towards men (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013) and the socio-cultural conditions in both countries. For example, in 2010, 87 percent of those migrants deported from the USA to Mexico were male, which is much higher than the share of men within the overall Mexican immigrant population (54%) (Passel et al. 2012). Furthermore, Ravuri states that due to the challenges involved in crossing the border without documentation, females are less likely to attempt crossing multiple times, and they are also less likely than males to work in seasonal employment, leading to more permanent settlement in the USA (2013:7). Regarding the socio-cultural conditions, researchers argue that males stand to lose a great deal of social status by leaving a highly patriarchal society in Mexico, whereas females stand to gain a significant level of freedom in the USA and they therefore work harder to stay on that side of the border (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Woo 2013).

As for the age of returnees, Gandini and colleagues argue that while return migrant households tend to include older people, this pattern is similar to that of past flows (2015:142). What has changed is that there is a significant presence of young adults³⁶ (including members of the 1.5 generation of a productive and reproductive age) and children (including second generation – US-born) who have returned from the USA. This information

³⁶ According to Rivera-Sánchez (2011), the modal age of returnees is between 20 and 45 years old, and for Serrano et al. it is between 18 and 35 years old.

correlates with Pew Research Center reports which state that by 2010 Mexican-born adults represented about 75 percent of the total return flow from the USA; Mexican-born children represented approximately five percent; and US-born children of Mexican parents constituted the remaining 20 percent. The fact that there is a significant number of younger adult returnees contradicts previous research which suggests that older migrants are more likely to return to their 'home' countries (to retire), than younger migrants (Massey et al. 1987). This change in pattern may be related to the change in context and to the fact that immigration policies target young male undocumented migrants living in the USA.

With regard to marital status, Gandini and colleagues highlight that in 2010 the percentage of male and female returnees who were either married or in a civil partnership was considerably high (79.5 percent and 75.9 percent respectively) (2015:89). Furthermore, they recognise that a great number of returnees are heads of their households (either a spouse or parent) who are not accompanied by their families at the moment of their return (2015:142). This is supported by research done by Masferrer and Roberts (2012) who assert that returnees are slightly more likely to be living with extended family while in Mexico. While I was unable to find literature which addresses how many returnees have their family members with them in Mexico and how many returnees' families remained in the USA, some non-academic reports shed light on this issue. Kline (2013) states that between 2010 and 2012, 205,000 people who were deported reported being parents of children who were born and stayed in the USA. While we know that people who are removed from the USA represent a small proportion of the total number of returnees, it is important to recognise that one of the characteristics of current returnees is that while some return with their children (as presented earlier in this section), others are being separated from their families. This aspect is particularly worrying as, according to the Pew Research Center, in 2012 there were an estimated four million undocumented migrants living with their US-born children who are at constant potential risk of deportation (Passel and Cohn 2016).

Researchers seem to agree that while typically the average returnee would have basic (primary and secondary) education, due to the Financial Crisis and increase in deportations in recent years, the presence of returnees with high school or higher education has increased (Anguiano-Téllez et al. 2013: 128; Waddell and Fontenla 2015:3). Waddell and Fontenla's research tells us that, in addition to those removed from the USA, highly educated migrants who have clear advantages within local labour markets are more likely than others to return 'home' (2015:3). This finding contradicts earlier studies which propose that the

likelihood of return migration falls as education rises (Massey and Espinosa 1997). These authors also highlight the importance of documented status in this regard. It is not surprising that the negative effect of schooling on return is stronger for documented than undocumented migrants as the former are able to capitalise on their skills in the USA labour market, whereas the latter encounter strong barriers to economic mobility owing to their undocumented status. As a result, undocumented migrants with higher levels of education have less incentive to remain in the USA and a stronger motivation to return to Mexico.

Contemporary literature suggests that female returnees to Mexico have higher levels of education than their male counterparts, which is consistent with previous findings elsewhere (Lowell et al. 2008; Rendall et al. 2011; van Hook and Zhang 2011). As an example, Gandini and colleagues (2015:98) assert that the percentage of female returnees with high school education in 2010 was 26.5, which is higher than the percentage for non-migrants (24.7). As for male returnees, in the same year the percentage of men with high school education was 17.7, lower than that of non-migrants (28.4). In short, female returnees are fewer in number but more educated than both their non-migrant counterparts and male returnees. While there are some studies that focus on the situation of young returnees, including those from the 1.5 and second generations, these segments of the population are not always disaggregated in statistics and lack representation in qualitative literature which renders their experiences, characteristics and needs still widely unknown.

2.2.4. Where do migrants return to?

In relation to the geographies of Mexican emigration, Masferrer and Roberts (2012:469) have identified an increase in the outflows from non-traditional sending states and stated that while “the emigration rate among the poor is lower than the non-poor, [...] during the past 20 years, emigration has risen particularly rapidly in states with high poverty and marginality rates, and especially in the Southern region (Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla, Campeche)” (see also Bustamante 1992; Cornelious 1992). As for the geographies of return, Masferrer and Roberts have observed a change in the geography of return migration to Mexico, suggesting that differences in the place of migration (e.g. traditional and non-traditional), and particularly economic performance at a local level, influence return patterns (2012:475). High numbers of returnees in places with economic opportunities are likely to indicate not only the greater propensity of their inhabitants to return to these places (Lindstorm 1996; Reyes 2001), but also the area’s attractiveness to other returnees originally from less privileged localities. In other words, these researchers propose that the

usual distinctions between traditional and non-traditional sending states should be extended to include distinctions between receiving states: "...just as there are new origins of migration, there are new destinations of return" (Masferrer and Roberts 2012:491). Accordingly, some destinations appear to be less dependent on prior patterns of out-migration or emerging patterns of economic opportunity and more related to migrants' new condition as returnees. For example, Pombo shows how strong stigma as a result of deportation and lack of social ties in Mexico deter those that have forcibly left the USA to return to their communities of origin (2010). Similarly, she recognises that people who have been deported and intend to re-enter the USA tend to stay at the border region in a type of 'limbo', sometimes for years, as an idle floating population, waiting for the opportunity to re-enter the USA without documentation.

Furthermore, Masferrer and Roberts have identified a proportional increase of return to small rural communities located in recent emigration states. Their explanation for this contradictory finding is that migrants from these localities are less likely to have established strong communities in the USA with ample resources and strong social networks that could help migrants withstand the USA financial crisis and the subsequent economic recession (2012:485). This finding is supported by other researchers. While it is not clear if they refer to traditional or non-traditional states, Escobar (2012) and Rivera-Sánchez (2011) argue that returnees continue to return to their (rural) communities of origin despite the fact that these places are considered as lagging locations. Therefore, qualitative research focused on returnees from rural and urban non-traditional emigration areas with high levels of emigration and return may constitute an important contribution to the understanding of their migration flows and patterns, as well as the challenges to their reintegration upon return to Mexico.

2.2.5. How long were the returnees living abroad?

Some contemporary studies explore the length of time spent abroad, however they focus exclusively on migrants who have been removed by USA authorities (Gandini et al. 2015; Landa 2014; Mestries 2013; Padilla and Jardón 2014; Passel et al. 2012). Several of these studies use the *Encuesta sobre Migración de la Frontera Norte* (EMIF Norte - Survey of Migration at Mexico's Northern Border) to establish that there has been an increase in the number of deportees who report having residency in the USA and having spent significant periods of time outside Mexico. Furthermore, a report issued by Mexican authorities demonstrates that until 2000, more than 80 percent of deportees were people with less than

a day's stay in the USA, essentially detained upon their entry; by 2011 this percentage had decreased to just 15 percent while the number of people with longer stays (reaching up to 12 years) had increased considerably (INEGI 2014:6)³⁷. The removal of residents, either documented or undocumented, is critical as researchers have provided evidence from other countries that people who have spent longer periods abroad have more difficult reintegration experiences.

In sum, it is reasonable to say that Mexican return migration flows have typically been constituted by undocumented men of working age who own a property and/or have started an enterprise back in their communities in the Midwest region after a relatively short stay in the USA, working in low paid employment, and who return to reunify with their wife and children. However, today returnees include an extremely diverse range of people with distinct characteristics and various needs. Even if it is not always the case, economic forces and social networks have historically been determining factors in the initial emigration movement for a considerable number of Mexican migrants. Factors that motivate return are multifaceted and far more complex, based on individual, household³⁸ and contextual aspects. A combination of push and pull factors are thought to influence return within diverse levels of agency and volition. Furthermore, this return happens within communities and families that are also being shaped by this migration movement, and about which we have very limited information.

2.3. What do we know about integration?

The arrival and settlement of an immigrant group in a host society has been studied since the early twentieth century through various lenses and within multiple disciplines (see Park 1928). The migration field has developed multiple studies in order to understand the various dimensions of integration and how different immigrant groups integrate. Several terms such as adaptation, assimilation, inclusion, incorporation and integration have been used to refer to this process. The incorporation of an immigrant group into a host society is rarely a straightforward process, and in order to start unravelling and understanding the diverse

³⁷ Additionally, while information regarding Mexican migrants specifically is unavailable, the Pew Research Center asserts that among the nation's 10.4 million unauthorised adults in 2012, 15% have been in the USA for less than five years, 62% for a decade or more, and approximately 21% for two decades or more.

³⁸ Later in this thesis I argue that many of those factors considered as individual and household aspects are more related to gender life course constraints that have been conferred on individuals for being a man or a woman.

elements and challenges this process presents for all actors involved, it is important to begin by considering the following questions: ‘integration of whom?’ and ‘integration into what?’ (Castles et al. 2002; King and Skeldon 2010:1635). In this research, I will look at the incorporation of Mexican migrants into the society of the USA and, in greater detail, into Mexican society upon their return. While there are differences between the processes of integration versus reintegration, there are also similarities as in both contexts the individual undergoes a process of adaptation to a new environment. The integration literature is better developed theoretically than that which addresses reintegration, and offers important insights that can be applied to the return context (Kuschminder 2017:22). In the following section, I will discuss some of the main theories utilised in the integration literature, its contributions as well as its main criticisms, and I will define the use of this concept for this study. It is not possible in this brief section to provide an entire overview of the vast integration literature, and therefore only aspects of the debate relevant for application in this thesis will be discussed.

2.3.1. Introducing the concepts of assimilation, multiculturalism and integration

Generally speaking, assimilation is a concept that has been developed in the USA and associated with the idea of ‘Americanisation’. While some researchers disagree with the idea that assimilation was conceived as a one-way process (see Kivisto 2005 in Oeppen 2009:12), it is commonly associated with the ‘melting pot’ analogy. Brubaker provides some historical context of how the assimilation theory was developed in the early twentieth century and exemplifies it with the experience of German immigrants in the USA. He describes the way in which the recently arrived migrants had to give up their language, social habits and even their names to be accepted in their host country (Brubaker 2014). In other words, this process was considered one through which newcomers became acculturated; upon arrival the ethnic background of the individual would be expected to be erased for the sake of respecting and promoting the homogeneity of the host population. Portes and Böröcz conclude that an assimilationist approach was required due to the undesirable ‘social disequilibrium’ created by a clash of the conflicting cultural values and norms of the newly arrived ‘foreigners’ and locals (1989:614). The resolution of this tension therefore depended on the cultural and social absorption of newcomers into the mainstream society.

The expansion of civil rights after World War II necessitated a revision of the assimilation theories and practices in favour of a new ideology of the equality of races and people (Joppke 2007; Joppke and Morawska 2002:4; Kymlicka 2012:6). Some of the main

criticisms of the assimilationist approach are that it fails to (i) take into account the plurality of the (individual and collective) actors involved in the process, (ii) incorporate the involvement of the host communities (including their contexts and institutions), making it a 'one sided' process, and (iii) acknowledge the diversity within both the immigrant and host communities (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas 2016:3; Portes and Böröcz 1989).

During the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of assimilation lost traction in some of the so-called 'Western democracies' where individuals with, for example, diverse sexual preferences, religious or ethnic backgrounds, were no longer expected to conform to a single way of being and relating to one another within a mainstream part of the society. This period saw the rise of the concept of multiculturalism, in which there is acknowledgment and positive incorporation of group differences through 'group-differentiated ethno-political rights' (Kymlicka 1995). In other words, the state legally and politically accommodates the various needs and backgrounds of diverse ethnic groups including, but not exclusively, those of migrants. Theorists assert that adopting a multiculturalist approach promotes a 'democratic citizenisation', which entails transforming both the relationships between the state and minorities and the horizontal relationships between members of different groups, in order to build fairer and more inclusive democratic societies (Kymlicka 2012:6). Some of the most emblematic experiences of multiculturalism have been in Western countries such as Australia, Canada, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. A significant difference in their approaches is that, while in Australia and Canada multicultural policies target the entire population, in Great Britain and European countries multiculturalism primarily targets immigrants.

Various authors propose that during the 2000s we have witnessed a retreat from multiculturalism in certain countries, Great Britain and Sweden for example. One of the key arguments behind this withdrawal is that multiculturalism has promoted the 'segregation' of certain groups, such as migrants, creating an opposite result to the intended one (Etzinger 2000:20). For example, Joppke and Morawaska explain that the multiculturalism approach in Sweden led to the creation of economic gaps between migrants and non-migrants. Specifically, they identify that during the 1990s Sweden experienced a rise in the arrival of migrants who were reported to experience high levels of unemployment, particularly when compared with the non-migrant population (Joppke and Morawaska 2002:14). As another example, Alibhai-Brown asserts that Britain experienced the radicalisation of various ethnic groups and a consequent rise in racist attacks such as the renowned case of the Black

British 19-year-old Stephen Lawrence, murdered in 1993 on a street in South London. According to Alibhai-Brown, multiculturalism in Britain set in motion a process of fragmentation and the revival of nationalisms rather than the creation one of collective citizenry (2001). Furthermore, multiculturalism has been considered by many, including politicians (see David Cameron's speech in Munich 2011), as an unfeasible model of incorporation of ethnic groups in so-called 'liberal states' due to its 'toleration' of diverse cultural practices, such as those promoted by Islam, that jeopardise the foundations of these states' liberal values.

Therefore, we have witnessed a move away from multiculturalism and towards a so-called 'civic integration'. According to Goodman, this new approach is based on the idea that successful incorporation into a host society depends not only on employment (economic integration) and civic engagement (political integration), but also on individual commitment to characteristics typifying national citizenship, specifically country knowledge, language proficiency as well as liberal and social values (2010). In other words, this approach targets individuals (instead of ethnic groups) who, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, are considered to need to develop a better civic attachment to their political community. Some academics have criticised this model due to its reassertion of ideas of 'nation building', common values and identity, and unitary citizenship, linking it back to the outdated concept of 'assimilation' (Kymlicka 2012:3).

The concept of integration is a much-contested term that has been most frequently used in Europe, including the UK (Erdal 2013:985). In a general sense, the term has been used to try to describe a process contrary to assimilation; as a rejection of the 'forced acculturation' that assimilation represented (Joppke and Morawaska 2002). From a sociological perspective, David Lockwood defines social integration as 'the inclusion of new individuals in a system' and introduces it as a 'two-way process' of adjustment through which all actors involved (including individuals and the system as a whole) develop mutual relationships (1964 in Heckmann 2006:10). Similarly, in his Social System Theory, Talcott Parsons suggests that the functional problem of integration is one of mutual adjustment of the units or subsystems according to their contributions to the effective functioning of the structure as a whole (1961:427, 2007). As is the case with assimilation and multicultural approaches, integration acknowledges the need for adjustment by the actors involved. According to the integration approach, the aim of this adjustment is mutual interaction and contribution between individuals and groups for the effective functioning of the system,

rather the eradication of certain characteristics of a given group as proposed by the assimilationist approach, or the total acceptance of them as proposed by the multiculturalist approach.

Specifically, when referring to migrants' incorporation, Heckmann defines integration as a "generations lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migrants in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society" (2006:17). Furthermore, this author highlights that there are differences in how migrants and the receiving society experience this process. For the migrants, the integration process encompasses, among other aspects, acquiring rights, access to positions and statuses within their institutions and markets, learning a new culture, building personal relations with members of the receiving society, as well as developing feelings of belonging to and identifying with the wider society. For the receiving society, this process entails adapting its policies and institutions to migrants' needs, creating opportunities for them to fully incorporate into their new society, as well as learning new ways of interacting with the newcomers. In addition to the bi-directionality aspect mentioned earlier, Heckmann's definition of integration highlights its long-lasting and multi-layered nature. This author analyses migrants' integration processes by looking at their experiences on three different levels, the macro (e.g. context, norms and policies developed by the states), meso (e.g. institutions, relationships and statuses among actors) and micro (e.g. the empirical patterns of adaptation and the lived experiences of migrants) (2006:26).

While Heckmann's definition acknowledges overarching challenges such as the status (and power) imbalance between migrants and the 'receiving society', it fails to reflect on the fact that the so-called 'receiving society' is not a cohesive and homogeneous group into which migrants, as outsiders, need to incorporate (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas 2016:12). There are usually many other less privileged groups that have been historically excluded and are also in the process of being incorporated into the 'receiving society'. Broadly speaking, the term 'social inequality' has been used when referring to differential treatment of, and lack of access to rights and opportunities for, individual actors (e.g. access to education, employment or social protection) (Heckmann 2006:20). Additionally, social differentiation refers to differences in the various social systems within a broader societal context (e.g. gendered division of labour or immigrant racial profiling). These concepts are particularly relevant while studying reintegration of Mexican returnees and the possible implications for particular groups such as women, youth or forced returnees. As Heckman

and other authors have highlighted, the integration of new members into a society is complex, particularly when migrants aim to integrate into a developing country with a 'super-diversified' society with established patterns of social inequality and social differentiation (Meissener and Vertovec 2015) such as Mexico.

Definitions of integration are diverse. Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas define it as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" (2016:14), a definition which highlights two important aspects of the concept of integration. Firstly, integration is understood as a process rather than the result of a process. Secondly, particular requirements for acceptance by the 'receiving society' are not specified and this openness highlights the fact that indicators of 'becoming an accepted part of the society' might vary from case to case. Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas identify the bi-directional and multi-dimensional aspects of this concept but their analysis focuses on the relationship between the migrants and the host society, instead of solely on the migrants' process. Therefore, they propose various areas of focus for the study of integration: (i) the legal-political, (ii) the socio-economic, and (iii) the cultural-religious, which correspond to what they consider as the three main aspects that are at stake when becoming accepted as part of the society: the state, the market, and the nation (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas 2016:14).

Similarly, other studies share the assumption that migrants are engaged in multiple, autonomous and interdependent dimensions or systems while in the integration process (see Ager and Strang 2008; Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Heckmann and Schnapper 2003; Spencer 2011; Spencer and Charsley 2016). Authors have categorised the various areas of this process differently; however, they can be summarised in five groups: i) the structural dimension incorporates migrants' participation in local institutions, e.g. formal participation in education or in the labour market; ii) the social dimension concerns how migrants maintain and develop social bridges and bonds, e.g. relationships with family members, or with non-migrant groups; iii) the cultural dimension includes the preservation or change in values, attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle, e.g. migrants' adoption of locals' dress code or liberal values; iv) civic and political participation encompasses the incorporation (or not) into local community life and the democratic process through acquiring the right and documents to vote; and v) the identity dimension looks at the processes through which individuals develop, on some level, a shared identity and sense of belonging with the place, nation, communities and people among whom they live.

Authors have highlighted how the conceptualisation of integration into these various dimensions is necessarily complex (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016; Spencer and Charsley 2016). On one hand, in some cases the separation between these categories is less evident. For example, the civic and political participation domain could also be considered as part of the structural one due to migrants' need to access local electoral institutions in order to be able to vote. On the other hand, these domains can be interdependent. For example, migrants' access to employment (structural dimension) may condition their socialisation and development of relations with non-migrants (social dimension), and subsequently their access to the local culture (identity dimension). Holistic studies that review all these different dimensions and their interrelations are rare, though much needed. Moreover, as the conceptualisation of integration as well as the definition of its dimensions may vary, it is important that authors of empirical studies define the term and specify the indicators of integration for further theoretical development (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016:14).

2.4. What do we know about the linkages between return migration and reintegration?

Return is the process of going back to one's country of origin, and reintegration is generally the story of what happens next. Yet, research on the reintegration of return migrants has been scarce. This is most likely due to the explicit assumption that as people are returning 'home', reintegration should be a straightforward process (King 2017). Regardless of the type of return, or the migrant's characteristics, there is an expectation that the returnee will be able to reincorporate smoothly upon return. These assumptions indicate that there is still little understanding of this complex and multi-layered process (Kuschminder 2017:15). Therefore, various academics have drawn upon theories of integration in order to understand how different groups of returnees adapt to their 'home' societies. In the following section, I will discuss several of the aspects that have been addressed in the literature as key to the reintegration process of migrants into their countries or communities of return.

2.4.1. Contexts, places of return and returnees' profiles

Some researchers have acknowledged that migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who return to their countries of origin are in a similar situation to that which they faced when they first arrived at their host countries (Davids et al. 2009). Moreover, the contexts in their

countries and communities of origin can be as challenging (or more so) as those in the host countries. Therefore, the integration literature has an obvious and important contribution to make to understandings of reintegration. A study of integration processes in European cities concluded that “the receiving society, its institutional structure and its reactions to newcomers are consequently far more decisive for the outcome of the process than the immigrants themselves” (Penninx et al. 2004:142). Furthermore, specifically regarding the reintegration of returnees to their countries of origin Cerase, among other authors, has highlighted that contextual aspects at a macro level, such as norms and policies developed in countries and localities of return, as well as socio-economic factors, have an extremely important influence on return migrants’ ability to reintegrate and contribute to their communities of origin (1974:260). Additionally, Cassarino argues that contextual factors and structures (including latent and open divisions, conflicts and constraints) also influence returnees’ reintegration processes (2004:271, 2008). In other words, the acquisition of equal rights and the incorporation of returnees into the core institutions of the community of return are essential components of successful reintegration. This is dependent upon the government policies and institutions, the structural and cultural environment, and the attitudes of the local population towards the reception of the returnees.

As far as place is concerned, Cassarino (2004) and King and Skeldon (2010) argue that the area of settlement (e.g. rural or urban) determines the reintegration processes of returnees and shapes return migrants’ ability to adapt; this is intimately related to the resource mobilisation theory introduced earlier. In short, it is expected that, depending on the skills gained (if any) and assets available, the returnee would be better prepared to adapt to either a rural or an urban setting, and contribute to the development of his or her community. Other authors have concluded that it is highly probable that, in cases where the returnees’ acquired social capital, attitudes and values no longer align with those of the place of return, it is common that they re-migrate from their place of origin to another locality that offers better opportunities for their reintegration (Kuschminder 2017; Masferrer 2014). In the words of Cela, place determines returnees’ wellbeing as many forms of capital and assets are place-specific (2017). The notion of place is particularly relevant for this study and has been considered in the selection of the field sites. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of what role the place of return plays in the reintegration experiences of returnees in both rural and urban Mexico.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, researchers argue that aspects such as age (at

migration and return), gender, life course, education and occupation as well as social status influence the ability of migrants to successfully adjust upon their return (Ammassari 2003; Cassarino 2004; Chizu Sato & Niehof 2016; Christou and King 2015; Erdal and Ezzati 2015; Gmelch 1980; King 1977; Kuschminder 2017; Majidi 2017; Negi et al. 2018). Early studies, such as those conducted by King (1977) and Gmelch (1980, 1983), highlight the relevance of differentiating the demographic characteristics of return migrants in order to gain a better understanding of their reintegration experiences. These authors call our attention to the need to acknowledge the experiences of distinct groups such as children, the elderly or female migrants, and both conclude that more research is required to better understand how these aspects affect migrants' adjustment process to their communities of return.

Regarding life course, Erdal and Ezzati (2015) conclude that migrants' age and family responsibilities are relevant to their return considerations. While the authors specifically look at how these variables relate to settlement and return intentions, these may be factors that have an impact on the reintegration experience. Furthermore, Ammassari (2003) and Kuschminder (2017) conducted research in three different African countries (respectively in Ghana and Ivory Coast and in Ethiopia) and highlighted the role that education and social status have played in the reintegration process of returnees. Interestingly, both of these authors recognise that the social position that their research participants held prior to migrating is strongly correlated to the position that they hold when they return, which highlights the relevance of pre-migration characteristics to the reintegration process.

As it has been aptly demonstrated by different authors, gender is central to all aspects of migration, starting from the out journey and including all its following movements (Donato et al. 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford 2006; Mahler & Pessar 2006). Even though the fact that gendered analysis has become more integral in migration studies, gendered analysis of return migration and the reintegration experience is relatively small (Girma 2017:9). Girma revises the existing literature and identifies that men and women pursue different strategies in terms of settlement in the host countries and plans for return migration. For example, he concludes that men are more likely than women to initiate and plan for a return to their home countries, rather than envision a permanent settlement in the host country. On the other hand, reflecting their preference for long-term or permanent settlement in the host nations, women have a tendency to save less but rather spend a bigger portion of their incomes in the host countries as well as resist more to the idea of return due to the traditional role and restrictions placed upon them in their home communities (Ammassari 2004). Therefore

women generally spend their earnings on sustaining the family and invest in durable items that will keep them grounded in the host country. As we will see later in this chapter, these findings have similarities to the ones of Gandini and her colleagues (2015) in regard to Mexican return flows. Through their studies, these authors emphasise that return migrants are a heterogeneous group, and they argue that any assumption of return migrants as homogenous is misleading.

2.4.2. Pre-return experiences

Various authors assert that understanding migrants' post-return experiences requires a holistic approach whereby experiences and living conditions during previous migration phases are considered (Lietaert et al. 2017, see also Gualda and Escriva 2014; van Houte and Davids 2008). Some of the pre-return aspects that authors have highlighted in the literature as relevant for the reintegration process are motivations to emigrate and life in the host country, including the length of stay abroad and immigration status. In terms of migrants' motivation to emigrate, NELM theorists state that when emigration is motivated by an economic strategy with a specific goal, return migration constitutes the logical outcome of the established project. Therefore, reintegration is expected to happen smoothly as migrants have calculated the acquisition and accumulation of sufficient resources (savings and remittances) to guarantee a successful reincorporation into life back 'home' (Cassarino 2004:255). As we will learn from this research, more often than not migrants do not have definite return plans as they often emigrate on a trial basis, letting their decision of whether or not to return and when to return be guided by the opportunities they find in the new society (Gmelch 1980:138). Therefore, as seen earlier in the literature review of the Mexican case, return happens spontaneously and is motivated by aspects related to life in the host country or unresolved situations back 'home' (e.g. being deported or having an ill parent in need of care). Furthermore, the ability to reintegrate relies on the (limited) preparedness of the returnee and the support available in the country of origin.

In relation to life in the host country, Gmelch (1980) asserts that if the duration of stay abroad is short, the migrant can reintegrate easily into the strong networks still available to them, but if the period of absence is extensive, returnees may be alienated from their original society, or they may be of an older age at which reintegration is improbable. Somewhere in between, an optimum length of absence might be found whereby the absence is sufficiently long to have influenced the migrant and allowed him/her to absorb certain experiences and values, and yet sufficiently short that he or she still has time and energy upon return to utilise

newly acquired skills and attitudes (King 1986:19). As we can see from these early overviews by Gmelch and King, migrants' integration experiences in the host country (which are linked to migrants' immigration statuses) and the transnational links maintained with the country of origin are also key in the reintegration process.

More recently, Cassarino (2004) introduced important other aspects that may influence returnees' ability to reintegrate. This author argues that the propensity of returnees to be able to reintegrate into their communities depends on their return preparedness, which includes their readiness (ability to mobilise material and social resources), and willingness to go back home (Cassarino 2004:271, 2008). In short, this author argues that the extent of returnees' preparation will be inherently linked to their ability to reintegrate.

More recently, Cassarino (2016) proposed the concept of the migration cycle to further elaborate on two aspects of return, migrants' preparedness and agency. This author specifies that the migration cycle is composed of three phases: emigration, immigration and return, and describes three possible ways in which these cycles culminate, these being complete, incomplete and interrupted. According to Cassarino, a complete cycle is when the person assesses their situation and decides to return; an incomplete cycle is when the migrant intended to stay abroad for longer but it is not possible for them to do so and he/she is forced to return; and in the interrupted cycle the person also had the intention to stay for longer but something disturbed their plan and, after evaluating the situation, he/she decides to go back. The difference between the incomplete and interrupted cycles is that in the interrupted cycle, the individual has a certain degree of agency as the person can evaluate the situation and subsequently decide to return. This assessment process does not happen in the incomplete cycle. Cassarino's concept of migration cycle is particularly relevant while researching migrants' ('voluntary', compelled and forced) return to Mexico because it allows us to better understand how even a marginal use of agency can make a difference to the emotional readiness of migrants, and therefore to their general wellbeing.

Based on Cassarino's framework, it might be assumed that migrants for whom it is not possible to prepare their return (forced return) experience negative reintegration outcomes, and those who are better able to decide and prepare (compelled and voluntary return) experience more positive reintegration outcomes; however this is not always the case. Several authors have concluded that those who have had (to a certain extent) more agency in the ability to decide to return may have higher expectations, and therefore they may be more likely to feel disappointed by their actual return experience (Erdal and Oeppen 2017;

King and Kılınc 2014; Muggeride and Dona 2006; Oeppen 2013). In other words, preparedness for return does not necessarily have a positive effect on returnees' ability to reintegrate as migrants' post-return conditions, experiences and the impact of these aspects on migrants' wellbeing, must also be considered.

2.4.3. Post-return experiences

Holistic studies of the reintegration experiences of returnees are rare, but those that take into account all the various integration dimensions introduced earlier in this chapter (structural, social, cultural, civic and political participation dimensions), and analyse the interrelations between them, are even scarcer (see Kuschminder 2017). In the following section, I will incorporate the literature related to the various aspects of the reintegration of migrants into their communities of return, which will later inform my case study.

When considering the structural dimension of reintegration, which implies access and participation in local institutions, literature has focused more on the experience of returned refugees than that of economic or labour migrants. Therefore, the literature is largely concerned with issues such as access to rights, protection, property restitution, reconciliation and peace building, restoration of livelihoods, monitoring access to basic needs such as food, water, and sanitation, or to essential services such as health and education (Davies 2004 in Kuschminder 2017:9; see Long and Oxfeld 2004). With regard to economic migrants' access to and participation in local institutions, some studies focus on the experience of returnees in accessing education or the labour market (see Lulle 2017; Medina and Menjivar 2015; Román and Hamann 2014; Sheehan and Riosmena 2013). However, apart from a few exceptions (Kuschminder 2017), these studies do not systematically consider the wider access of returnees to their basic needs and rights. Presumably, this is because it is assumed that non-refugee returnees are not in situations of vulnerability upon return and that 'economic' migrants return with sufficient resources to enable them to independently meet their own needs. As Kuschminder (2017) and other authors show (see also Erdal and Oeppen 2017; Hasselberg 2013; Miller 2012), this assumption is not always correct as deportees, rejected asylum seekers, and low-skilled migrants can all return in situations of vulnerability wherein they need support in order to be able to meet their basic needs and struggle for equal access to rights.

Reintegration involves creating and negotiating new relationships as well as re-establishing earlier ties (Miller 2008:66-68; Phillips 2004:157). Unsurprisingly, connections between returnees and the 'home' communities are often complex as usually both sides

experience changes (to a certain degree), and develop a set of expectations which have to be negotiated over time. Issues related to political orientation, religious and cultural beliefs and practices, as well as gendered social interactions are only a few of the many areas in which returnees and their communities of origin may come into conflict or undergo transformation (Cerase 1974; Gmelch 1980; Hammond 2004; King 1977; Smith 2006). Therefore, having strong social networks or regaining access to them upon return has been considered as a key aspect for reintegration (Boccagni 2011; Davids et al. 2009; Kuschminder 2017; van Houte and Davids 2008; van Metereen et al. 2014). Specifically, van Houte and Davids assert that the extent to which a returnee can benefit from their social capital depends on the type of social networks he or she has. They specify that it is not so much the size as the meaningfulness of returnees' social networks that matter. Both in terms of emotional and material support, the possibility of relying on social relationships is crucial for returnees to become reintegrated (2008:1418). As we will see later in this thesis, this aspect is particularly important in those cases where the state support is non-existent or inadequate, as in the case of Mexico.

King, among other authors, has concluded that, aside from individual motivations, there are cultural, political and social factors that determine migrants' decisions to return or not to return 'home' (2000). Return is often motivated by a change in local politics that presumably can lead to greater socio-economic stability and a safer environment in post-conflict states (Kuschminder 2017:59). In other cases, return is encouraged as part of a political strategy where governments issue policies that actively promote return (see Boccagni 2011). Moreover, political reintegration refers to returnees' active participation in the civic and political processes of the country. As will be discussed later in this thesis, returnees' active participation in the civic and political spheres depends not only on the social capital developed in the host countries, but also on how much they identify with and feel part of their communities of return. Furthermore, their possible contributions to development depend on the positions of authority and power that they hold in their communities (Ammassari and Black 2001:34) as well as on the contexts into which they integrate (Cassarino 2004). In other words, when the macro conditions and structures in the 'home' country are not propitious, returnees remain on the side-lines of civic and political participation and often their capital acquisitions remain underutilised.

In order to analyse the cultural dimension, researchers often consider returnees' participation in religious or cultural events, and to what extent they follow the norms and

values of the society of the community of return (see Smith 2006:242). Often authors define returnees' cultural experiences upon return as a 'reverse cultural shock', where returnees' new ideas and customs may make them stand out and clash with the 'non-migrant culture', making it difficult to adjust and feel at 'home'. This process often results in the social exclusion of returnees and in the development of a 'return identity' and, in some cases, even the creation of return 'enclaves' wherein returnees only interact with each other (Kuschminder 2017:22; Stefansson 2004). As an example of how important culture is in the daily life of returnees, Lulle analyses the experience of teenagers who returned to Latvia and how their inability to speak the language negatively affected their reintegration experience and wellbeing (2017). On the other hand, researchers' findings suggest that migrants who were 'homeland' oriented while living abroad, often realise upon return that they have a more traditionalist approach to culture than non-migrants. Therefore, it is common for them to feel disappointed upon return (see King and Christou 2010). As stated previously in this chapter, and as we will see in the following chapters, cultural reintegration also depends on various factors such as sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, education and occupation), life course, time spent living abroad and the opportunities of integration in the host country.

Most existing studies of return migration seem to conclude that returnees, more often than not, experience unhappiness and dissatisfaction as an outcome of their post-return experiences (King 2000:19). This makes us wonder why, despite this disappointment, people do not re-migrate. One of the answers proposed by King and Christou, from their research with second-generation returnees to Greece, is that if people did not re-migrate despite their disappointment it was because leaving the 'homeland' would "fundamentally undermine their lifelong sense of who they are (ethnic Greeks above all) and where they ultimately belong (in the Greek homeland)" (2010:117).

Identity and sense of belonging are intimate and fundamental aspects of people's lives. According to Kuschminder, returnees' sense of belonging can overlap, and the notion of 'home' can have multiple meanings to them (2017:123). This sense of belonging and meanings of 'home' are often products of an individual evaluation of the various aspects of the reintegration experience. At the same time, this evolving sense of belonging plays a significant role in the process of reintegration (Vathi 2017:9). In other words, the evolving sense of belonging and the reintegration experience reciprocally feed into each other and are closely intertwined.

2.4.4. Undocumented migration and its implications for return and reintegration

While the initial intention of this research was to have a balance between documented and undocumented migrants, following the fieldwork phase I realised that a great majority of my research participants migrated and returned without documents³⁹ and this fact had a profound effect on all their migration phases (emigration, settlement, return and reintegration). While there has been a growing interest in the return of undocumented migrants, researchers argue that the focus has been on deportees, particularly government policy and the deportation process itself, and much less attention has been given to the post-deportation experience (Hasselberg 2013:18). One of the few exceptions is a study by Pohl that focused on the experience of Chechen and Ingush people being deported to Kazakhstan. Through this case study, Pohl concluded that forced return had long-lasting effects that went beyond the actual removal of individuals and affected their reintegration process (2002) as well as their wellbeing.

From the few studies available, researchers recognise that some of the difficulties forced returnees face during reintegration are similar to those that migrants face when arriving in the host countries, for example a lack of knowledge of the language, history and culture, as well as being uninformed about the local lifestyle and relevant networks (Drotbohm 2015). Pohl's findings coincide with those of previous researchers cited in this text, who concluded that reintegration difficulties will worsen depending on the length of time spent abroad and the age of migration (Cassarino 2004; Erdal and Ezzati 2015; King 2000). In relation to the structural dimension, Lietaert et al. (2014:145) assert that forced returnees' 'new lives' (in an old and undeveloped context) are often challenging due to their inability to prepare, and mobilise financial and human capital. Returnees' ability to meet their basic needs (e.g. shelter) and access to job opportunities, could be limited, thereby forcing them to live in precarious conditions and preventing them from attaining a sustainable livelihood (Black et al. 2004; van Houte and Davids 2008). Moreover, due to their unpreparedness and (often) unwillingness to return, emotional problems may arise and render it difficult to cope with economic adversity (Ghanem 2003; Ghazaryan et al. 2002; van Houte and Davids 2008).

As for the social dimension, several studies highlight the fact that returnees face rejection from their peers. Due to the social significance of return, many migrants only return under

³⁹ 54 out of 60 of my participants travelled with no documents, four travelled with tourist visas and overstayed and only two reported travelling with residency permits. While in the USA, access to documents was impossible for a great majority except for two who became citizens. This will be explored in detail in the following chapters.

adequate conditions, for example when they are able to afford a certain 'style of return', which would in many parts of the world imply the distribution of money and gifts and the hosting of friends and family with drinks and food (Baldassar 2001; Drotbohm 2012, 2015:659). Drotbohm highlights that people who are forced to return cannot always meet these expectations, which can therefore give rise to a negative reception by their 'home' communities. Forced returnees are often seen as failed immigrants and a disappointment to those related to them. As explained by Lietaert et al. (2014), a migrant returning empty-handed to his country of origin will usually face financial difficulties. However, Drotbohm highlights that returnees' relatives and friends on both sides of the border may also suffer financially as a result (2015:659) and they are therefore considered as an 'economic burden'. Moreover, when migrants become immobile in their countries of origin and have to receive remittances sent from their loved ones who 'remain behind' in the USA, established norms and hierarchies as well as common expectations become dislocated (Drotbohm 2015:667).

Another reason for the rejection of forced returnees is highlighted by Schuster and Majidi (2015), who assert that individuals in immigrant-producing societies want to maintain their fantasies that migration is a pathway to progress (see also Wright 2012b). Therefore, they are more likely to stigmatise deportees as failures than to attribute deportation to conditions in the country from which deportees were removed. All of the above-mentioned factors can differ for men and women. For example, contrary to the case of women, men more often face deportation but women who are deported are more commonly stigmatised than men. In the words of Drotbohm, "...not only is gender significant in the way in which migration is seen in the context of the deportees' origin, it also structures the experiences of deportation and post-deportation life" (2015:660).

Studies have highlighted that in the case of female deportees, in comparison to males, they struggle with a particularly bad reputation as a result to their deportation. The image of a deported woman goes against common expectations people have of migrant women (and mothers), who are expected to live morally impeccable lives and dedicate themselves to earning money to send back to the families they left behind. Therefore, their deportation many times is considered unforgivable, leaving them with little support from their families and social networks. In contrast to female deportees' experiences, men can even draw positively on their criminal experiences and their reputations as '*bad hombres*' (Drotbohm 2014:662) portraying themselves as adventurous, tough and strong men.

Generally speaking, these studies conclude that returnees do not reintegrate successfully to the 'home' society to which they have returned and, overall, they experience an unstable living situation and as a consequence, high percentages of these returnees intend to re-migrate (Davids et al. 2009; Ghazaryan et al. 2002; van Houte and Davids 2008). This re-migration is particularly challenging for undocumented Mexican migrants, hence the majority of what were intended to be 'temporary' returns ultimately become 'permanent'. Therefore a 'forced' return also becomes a 'forced stay', or in the words of Carling (2002) 'involuntary immobility', which affects the readiness but particularly willingness of migrants to reintegrate. Hence they often remain in a type of protracted limbo that is detrimental for individuals, families and whole communities.

2.5. Return and reintegration of Mexican migrants

The scant available literature that focuses on the reintegration experience of Mexican returnees has seen increased contributions since 2010 and has been produced by researchers working on both sides of the border. There is a balance between literature that uses a quantitative approach and considers the phenomenon from a macro perspective through census and demographic surveys (see Gandini et al. 2015; Gitter et al. 2008; Montoya-Arce et al. 2011), and literature that uses a qualitative approach and that gathers data through interviews and ethnographies (see Anderson and Solis 2014; Medina and Menjívar 2015; Negi et al. 2018; Rivera-Sánchez 2013; Smith 2006). The most common topics are related to: i) Structural dimension, access to institutions, labour market, and (unattended) education and health needs; ii) Social dimension, returnees' development of social bridges and bonds; iii) Returnees' feelings of belonging and iv) Returnees' human and financial capital.

In terms of research that addresses aspects related to place, while there is literature available that focuses on traditional and non-traditional states of migration, there has been a disproportionate focus on rural rather than urban settings. In the following section, I will review the findings that are most relevant for this thesis.

2.5.1. Structural dimension

Researchers have found significant differences between current and past economic aspects of migrants' reintegration. Two of the very few studies I managed to find were developed in the last decade by the French scholar Jean Papail. Papail looks at the experience of

returnees in an urban location in the state of Jalisco (Midwest traditional emigration state). This author concludes that the migration experience in the USA helped returnees to transform their previous status and achieve upward mobility. In other words, returnees used the human and financial capital gathered abroad to obtain a better job or to invest in the local markets (Papail 2002; Papail and Arroyo 2004).

More recent studies shed light on a different reality in which current returnees do not experience the same upward mobility. As in many cases their jobs in the USA were low-skilled and/or the skills developed do not align with the needs of their places of return, contemporary returnees face higher challenges in finding employment (Alba et al. 2010; Osorno and Romero 2014; Rivera-Sánchez 2013; Salas-Alfaro 2013). In rural communities, Osorno and Romero conclude that “if a returnee does not work as a public-sector employee or in a government enterprise, informality and peddling wares are the only options for getting into work” (2014). Osorno and Romero highlight that the majority of returnees establish a business as a last resort, often in the informal sector due to their inability to find formal employment (see also Gandini et al. 2015). When comparing the situation of returnees with that of non-migrants, Gandini and colleagues conclude that in 2010 the proportion of migrant returnees in salaried occupations was less than that of non-migrants for both genders. Conversely, independent occupations demonstrate the opposite pattern (2015:109). Furthermore, Gandini and her colleagues conclude that the situation for current returnees is more precarious than for both non-migrants and those who returned to Mexico during the last decade. In other words, it can be argued that it is not the position of being a returnee but rather the current socio-cultural context which is negatively affecting the economic reincorporation of returnees.

On a more positive note, Waddell and Fontenla analyse migrants’ contributions to their home communities and their findings indicate that, as well as financial capital, return migrants are highly likely to return with less tangible, but arguably more important, forms of capital, such as human and cultural capital (2015:3). Additionally, these authors highlight that the degree to which these social transfers contribute (or not) to the development of migrants’ communities appears to depend greatly on local policies, which in many cases are scarce or non-existent. Anderson, through her work on call centres, gives an example of how returnees’ human capital (language and culture) has become the main asset for returnees, helping them to actively reintegrate into the job market in the growing call centre

industry which, in the words of the author, “figures as a safe haven, a community of support and an economic safety net for many young returnees” (2015:9).

As mentioned previously, for some migrants’ health and illness play a role both in the decision to return and in their reintegration process. In this regard, Ross and colleagues study access to health care for older Mexicans with a history of migration to the USA (2004). Using a representative dataset of older Mexicans on a national level, they found a robust negative association between years spent in the USA and the probability of being insured (Ross et al. 2004:4). This finding is particularly problematic for undocumented migrants who worked in the USA without documentation and have no access to pensions to be able to pay for private health services in Mexico. This, in theory, should not present a problem as uninsured returnees should have access to health care through programmes run by the Ministry of Health (*Seguro Popular*). In practice, Ross and colleagues’ findings show that returnees face the same constraints as non-migrants who are also uninsured (due to limited access to health clinics, disparities in the quality of care, and financial constraints), but typically have fewer resources to overcome these constraints.

Other health issues reported in the literature that affect the reintegration of returnees are the higher use of alcohol and drugs among returnees, drug use being even higher for those who have been deported (see De la Sierra and Gonzalez-Block 2013; Montoya-Arce et al. 2011; Ullmann et al. 2011; Velasco and Coubes 2013). While the use of substances may have preceded the migrant’s return to Mexico, researchers recognise that migrants face greater financial instability and physical danger following return than while living in the USA (Robertson et al. 2012). Robertson and colleagues concluded that there is an unmet need for health and social services, particularly among deported drug-using women, which highlights the need for and importance of (currently non-existent) access to mental health services and the dissimilar needs that men and women have upon return.

Another common topic found in the literature on reintegration in Mexico is access to education services, as well as the experience of returnees in the educational system. Researchers argue that while the majority of returnees place additional value on access to adequate education services, this is particularly problematic for bi-cultural students (Montoya-Arce et al. 2011). Waddell and Fontenla (2015) argue, in their study of the urban communities of Jalisco, that school attendance at an elementary level is high among returnees (including both those who have returned to Mexico and those born in the USA, who, in essence, are immigrants to Mexico). One of the main reasons for their high

attendance is that the experience of migration instils in their parents the belief in education as “the soundest avenue to obtain better employment and improve standards of living” (Waddell and Fontenla 2015). This finding is compatible with what Montoya-Arce et al. (2011) concluded in a previous study conducted in a non-traditional state of migration (Estado de Mexico). However, Medina and Menjívar found that, despite returnees’ interest in accessing education, Mexico’s school enrolment procedures and incorporation policies directed at children who have previously studied abroad are bureaucratic, complex and inconsistent (2015:2134). Furthermore, Sánchez-García and colleagues (2012) identify that, more often than not, Mexican teachers and school leaders are unaware of their bi-cultural students’ biographies, and there is therefore neither a formal nor informal effort made to help such students reconcile what they have learned at schools in the USA with what they are to learn in their new environment.

Additionally, in their study conducted in another traditional state of migration (Zacatecas), Hamann and Zúñiga found that the absence of a standard process for enrolling foreign children in schools allows for ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (e.g. school directors and other state personnel) to interpret and regulate national policies at their discretion (2011). To the authors’ surprise, they realised that in many cases the interpretation of national policies was not in favour of the children but rather against them. These authors concluded that it was common practice to treat bi-national children the same as any other non-migrant student and, in interviews with school authorities, the need to create a special programme for bi-cultural children was not recognised. Therefore, the authors conclude that the “dogma of a homogenous national identity in Mexico has a clear manifestation in school practices and relations” (2011:147). Researchers indicated that many of their research participants stated that, if given the chance, they would like to re-migrate in order to continue their education in the USA (Hamann and Zúñiga 2011; Medina and Menjívar 2015).

In sum, Gandini et al. argue that returned migrants are more excluded from the education system and the labour market than non-migrants (2015). However, these authors observe that there has been a slight improvement in the last decade (2000-2010). In 2000, returned women who were not accessing education nor employment constituted 47.4 percent, while in 2010 this percentage dropped to 43.7; these values for the non-migrant women were 34.9 percent and 30.9 percent respectively. In the case of returned men, the percentage of those not working or studying was 23.8 percent in 2000 and 20.5 percent in 2010; and for non-migrant men 34.8 percent and 11.4 percent respectively (2015:126). While this is an

interesting (and hopeful) finding, the factors that helped to achieve this relative improvement in terms of reintegration are not addressed by Gandini et al. I hope that my research will contribute an improved understanding of this process and help to develop better conditions for the return population.

2.5.2. Cultural dimension

Previously in this chapter I mentioned that many Mexican migrants returned when their desire or need to support their families and/or communities became more urgent than their own economic needs. However, after conducting research in a rural area of Mexico, researchers have highlighted the fact that many returnees experience a “myriad of complex feelings upon their return as their idealised version of ‘home’ often did not match their expectations and memories” (Pricket et al. 2012). Pricket and colleagues assert that returnees often did not find the idealised community they ‘remembered’ (or, perhaps, created in their minds); nor did they meet the expectations that community members and family had of them; and realised that their social networks had diminished. Furthermore, these authors’ research participants struggled to re-adapt to conditions in their town as they now perceived their precarious reality through a larger ‘transnational lens’ (2012:69). In other words, their life experiences in the USA changed their perception of their countries of origin and complicated the sense of ‘home’ for many, making it difficult to commit to the initial plan of a permanent return.

Williams studies the cultural identity of returnees and their relationship with their communities (2017). This author describes the struggles of both returnees and their communities to adjust to the new ‘other’. While they embrace the familiar aspects of each other, they reject (often with hostility) the perceived differences (2017:4). While researchers assert that there is no uniform conception of identity among returnees (Landa 2014:48), there is a consensus that communities expect returnees to be ‘more Mexican and less American’ (Hamann and Zúñiga 2011; Landa 2014; Smith 2006; Williams 2017). Landa argues that, in a country where the journey to the north side of the border has been embedded in the culture as a step towards progress and success, a return signifies a step backwards, especially if return happens in precarious conditions (2014:40). Some researchers highlight that relations between returnees and the non-migrant community tend to be worse in the case of people who return involuntarily. Gandini and colleagues conclude that due to the combination of factors that lead to a forced return, contemporary returnees are seen as failed migrants and as criminals, which feeds people’s prejudices and favours

discrimination (2015:176). Therefore, returnees and, in many cases even their closest family members, face various consequences related to this stigma, such as struggling to find a job, being unable to (re)marry and being the target of constant criticism.

An interesting case is that of the call centres, where transnational cultures coexist within and beyond the call centre itself⁴⁰. Anderson argues that call centres are creating a cultural and economic space where young returnees' integration into Mexican society is facilitated, and simultaneously limited, by the transnational economic imperatives of the sector (2015). Anderson concludes that return migration and the process of reintegration are challenging as well as arguably unjust, and yet also economically, historically, socially and culturally valuable.

2.6. Return migration and the '(re)integration framework'

Some of the diverse challenges in establishing an all-encompassing framework to analyse the reintegration experience of returnees are its multi-dimensional nature and the multiple aspects that influence it. While a few authors have attempted to contribute to the development of models (see Kuschminder's *Reintegration Strategies* 2017), a systemic approach to the study of reintegration is not yet established. This thesis will attempt to contribute to the development of a framework that helps to better understand the reintegration experience of returnees.

In order to study the reintegration experience of Mexican returnees, I will use a framework adapted from other integration models proposed previously. This framework is based on the study of the multiple dimensions of the integration process (structural, social, cultural, civic and political). Additionally, within this framework two key aspects that may influence the reintegration process of returnees will be considered: (i) contexts of return, including socio-economic characteristics of the place of return, governmental policies and norms, structural constraints, as well as ii) returnees' gendered life course, education and occupation; and (iii) pre-return and return aspects (motivations and/or pressures to migrate and return, life in the host country, as well as the type and place of return).

⁴⁰ Anderson (2015) in her article describes how, during their periodic breaks, a crowd of young people gathers outside of a US-based transnational call centre located in the historic city centre of Mexico City. A mixture of English and Spanish (Spanglish) can be heard, though a particularly bold English of street and youth cultures predominates. Indeed, a handful of those gathered look and sound like any Latino migrant from the streets of Los Angeles or Chicago.

Regarding the definition of the reintegration dimensions proposed in this framework, the structural aspect considers returnees' access to services and participation in local institutions (e.g. access to livelihoods, education and health services). The social dimension considers aspects related to the interactions of individuals in the society and private spheres (e.g. family, friendships and marriages), with a particular focus on the reestablishment and/or development of returnees' social bonds and bridges. The cultural dimension refers to the cognitive, behavioural, attitudinal and life-style changes of returnees and how these changes influence their cultural identification and orientation. The civic and political participation dimension explores the community and political involvement of returnees (Ager and Strang 2008; Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Etzinger 2000; Heckmann 2006; Spencer and Charsley 2016). Researchers who study integration usually incorporate an identity dimension which encompasses the processes through which individuals develop (to a certain extent) a shared identity and sense of belonging with the communities, localities and people amongst whom they live. In this research, I argue that the sense of belonging is an important element of a person's psychosocial wellbeing. In other words, it is an outcome of the individual, subjective assessment of the whole reintegration experience (with its key aspects and dimensions) and it will therefore be analysed separately.

This categorisation (as any other) is, to a certain extent, exploratory. Additionally, this framework acknowledges that the various dimensions of reintegration are interdependent and the boundaries between them are less evident in some cases than others. In other words, there is a dynamic interaction between these various categories; progress in one may positively or negatively affect another. For example, if a returnee is unable to obtain education certificates from the host country, he/she may not be able to access university education in the country of origin (structural dimension). Consequently, the returnee might activate his/her transnational social networks (social dimension) in order to establish a business. This whole situation may reinforce his/her cultural identification as more American than Mexican (cultural dimension). Recognising this dynamism is useful and helps us to view the reintegration process (in addition to the return) not as an 'end-state', but rather an ever-evolving process. Therefore, the results of this thesis will portray a snapshot of Mexican returnees' current reality, which is ever-changing (Spencer and Charsley 2016:5).

Moreover, this framework proposes that, in order to gain a deeper understanding of returnees' reintegration experiences, it is necessary to look beyond labels imposed by external parties (e.g. successful/unsuccessful, sustainable/unsustainable) and focus on

returnees' own evaluations of their migration projects and wellbeing (Erdal and Oeppen 2017; Wright 2012).

For her study of Peruvian migrants, Wright proposed the use of the concept of human wellbeing which considers the interplay between material (objective), perceptual (psychosocial) and relational domains (2012:9). According to Wright, the first is to do with welfare, access to public services, and standards of living, encompassing areas such as income, employment and housing, and people's subjective assessments of them. The second, the perceptual domain, covers aspects such as life enjoyment, personal safety, sense of belonging, autonomy⁴¹ and social status⁴² as well as culturally embedded meanings and understandings of norms and values for example of what is a "good life" or "good return" (King and Collyer 2016:179). The third, the relational domain, covers personal (kinship) and social relations with human wellbeing framed as a state of 'being' with others⁴³. This author proposes that rather than material, perceptual and relational wellbeing operating as separate categories, the interest lies precisely in a holistic understanding and the interplay that exists between them (Wright 2012b:470). Therefore, based on Wright's work, I will be analysing returnees' human wellbeing, taking into account that wellbeing is contextual, situationally specific and subject to change (Bendixsen and Lidén 2017). Furthermore, this framework proposes that human wellbeing will influence returnees' future aspirations including intentions to re-migrate (see Figure 2).

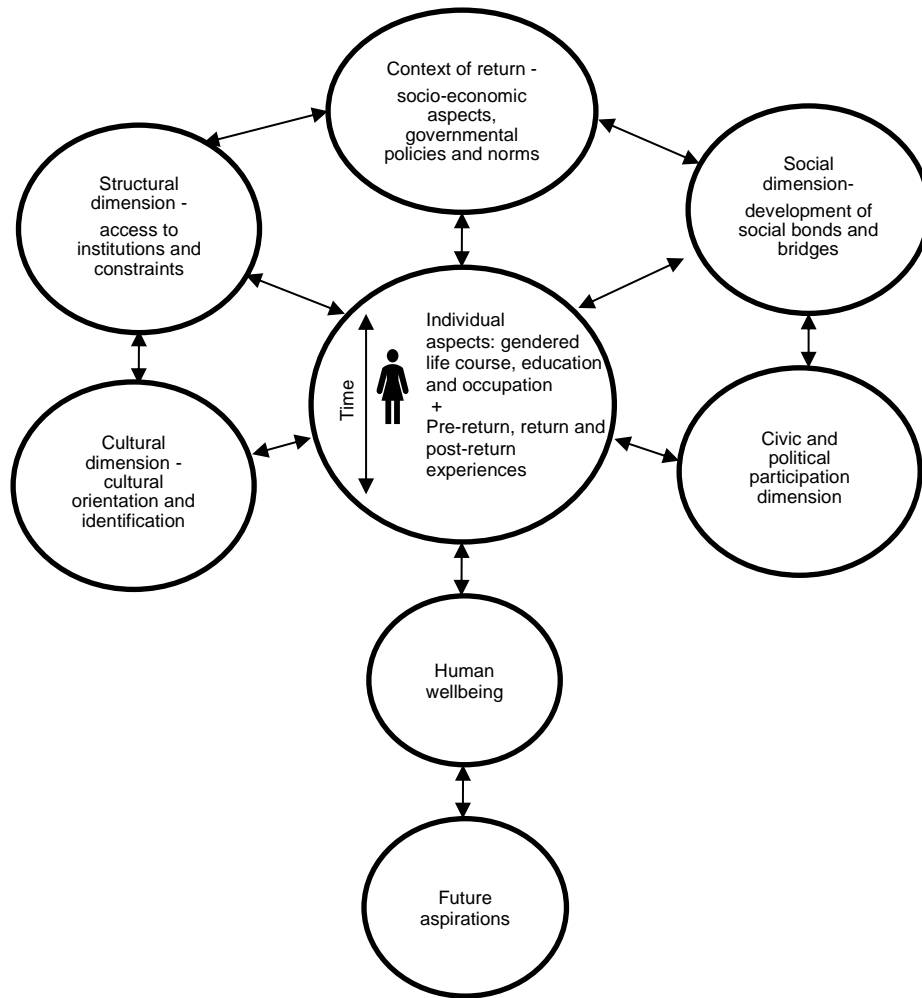
While one of the main strengths of the reintegration concept is that it recognises the interactive process between the individual and their return contexts, and considers a large number of variables (key individual aspects, pre-return, return and post-return experiences, and the human wellbeing dimensions), the strength of this concept is also its main weakness as it is often impossible to analyse all the relevant aspects in a single study. With this in mind, the use of the proposed framework for the analysis of the Mexican case will hopefully improve our understanding of the wide variety of returnees' reintegration experiences upon their arrival from the USA.

⁴¹ According to Doyal and Gough (1992) personal autonomy is what is necessary to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it in a given societal context.

⁴² Particularly in the Mexican society the reputation arising from achieving economic success in the USA is highly valued within the communities of origin.

⁴³ This dimension is intrinsically linked to the need of relatedness which is the universal desire to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others.

Figure 2. '(Re)integration framework'



Source: Author's model based on Ager and Strang 2008; Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Heckmann 2006; Spencer and Charsley 2016; Vathi 2017; Wright 2012

In order to have a more accurate terminology I am proposing to use the term '(re)integration' in this study. In order to best reflect reality, I have decided to make use of a parenthesis to indicate that the process can be experienced in different ways: as an integration process for returnees to whom Mexico feels so alien that return is experienced as coming to a new 'host' country, and as a (re)integration process for those migrants who experience the return as coming back to their 'home' country, or for those whose lives are caught in an 'in between' situation making them feel '*ni de aqui, ni de alla*' (neither from here, nor from there) or in some cases, '*de aqui y de allá*' (from here and from there).

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter provides the conceptual foundation for this thesis through a wide-ranging review of the existing literature related to return migration and integration. The proposed framework is informed by a multidisciplinary literature review and encompasses elements from return migration, integration, and human wellbeing research. Additionally, the objective of this chapter is to draw attention to: (i) the multiple aspects that influence migrants' return trajectories and the even more complex aspects and dimensions influencing (re)integration; (ii) the need to widen the definition of (re)integration to reflect learning from integration theory while acknowledging the particularities of this process; (iii) the introduction of the '(re)integration framework' that will help us to improve our understanding of the current experiences of Mexican returnees; and (iv) to acknowledge the importance of developing further literature on the (re)integration of contemporary returnees from and to the Global South. The proposed framework recognises the importance of aspects such as context of return including its structural constraints, individual aspects, pre-return and return aspects, and how these multiple factors influence the ability of return migrants to (re)integrate and impact their overall wellbeing.

Throughout this chapter, I have been able to reflect on how essential it is that migrants should not be considered as a homogenous group, and neither their return nor their (re)integration process should be thought of as standardised, straightforward processes. Return has always been part of the Mexico-USA migration flows, but it only began to be considered by social scientists during the last few years. In the new era of stringent immigration policies in the USA, the return of undocumented and documented migrants is often a compelled and forced process. However, it is important not to overlook the diversity of contemporary migrants' motivations to return. As demonstrated in the literature review on return to Mexico, while Mexican return migration flows have been characterised by undocumented men from the Mexican Midwest region, today returnees are an extremely diverse range of people with distinct characteristics, including migrants who became American citizens, families with mixed status (usually undocumented parents with US-born children), bi-cultural and bi-lingual highly qualified young migrants (1.5 generation), and a sector of the population in older age. While motivations of return are multifaceted, we can conclude that often the motivation to return is heavily based on gendered life course aspects and structural constraints within diverse levels of agency and volition. Furthermore, from the literature review we can conclude that this return is experienced by communities and families

about which we have very limited information, and who are scattered throughout the country. Understanding the various aspects that influence Mexican migrants' return motivations and trajectories will also help us to understand the complexities of their (re)integration processes and experiences.

As has been evident throughout my review and interpretation of the existing literature, integration is a highly complex process and, accordingly, (re)integration is too. The literature helped me to understand that in addition to the richness of factors to consider, it is also important to acknowledge the dynamisms of the process. The proposed framework is aimed to be a tool through which we can gain a wider and more holistic analysis of the (re)integration experience by acknowledging that the proposed aspects of (re)integration are interdependent and ever-changing. Therefore, we should not consider there to be a final outcome of (re)integration; we cannot say that returnees are integrated or not; we can only describe the stage of the process that they are currently in (Spencer and Charsley 2016). In other words, we cannot expect (re)integration to be the final stage of the migration trajectory, particularly in those cases where people have a negative perception of their post-return experience and therefore consider that their main goal of having a better life has not been achieved.

While the academic literature on the interactions between return and integration provides some answers, as a relatively new body of literature there are significant gaps, particularly in terms of the consideration of the multiple aspects involved in these processes. The majority of academic work in this area continues to focus solely on one specific dimension. This thesis aims to widen the empirical base for further discussion on return and (re)integration, and to explore where, on the (re)integration continuum, can be considered to lie these Mexican cases.

3. Fieldwork approach and methods of data collection

The main objective of this research project is to generate a better understanding of migrants' individual experiences of return and (re)integration and, by doing so, contribute to the existing theories and literature in this field. Assuming that it is possible to obtain knowledge about returnees' life experiences by utilising empirical data, the next question to be asked is, how is it possible to obtain suitable data to generate such knowledge? Qualitative research methods are widely used to facilitate the exploration of meanings, and the discovery of the nexus between diverse social aspects (Bryman 2004:271). Through the use of qualitative methods, I managed to gain access to migrants' life narratives and interpretations of their realities as well as was able to develop an in-depth understanding of their pre-return, return, and post-return experiences of (re)integration. Moreover, by using qualitative in-depth interviewing, I have been able to analyse the relationships between various factors of the (re)integration process, as well as returnees' own assessment of their human wellbeing. Additionally, the use of in-depth interviewing (within realist research designs; see (Iosifides 2011:179) approach has enabled me to gain a better understanding of the topic by facilitating my data collection and analysis of how other factors (e.g. context of return, structural constraints, gendered understanding and practices) have influenced returnees' experiences and wellbeing in two different localities. I acknowledge that one of the notable limitations of qualitative studies is the difficulty in generalising the results of such studies (Devine and Heath 1999:11). Therefore, while this research faces this limitation, it can be considered a solid piece of research that is generating valuable insights.

This chapter focuses on the research strategy that is utilised to attempt to answer the research questions introduced in Chapter 1. It comprises a review of my fieldwork approach and methods of data collection, and is organised as follows. First, I introduce the process that I used for the selection of my field sites and, in greater detail, the strategies for accessing them. This is followed by a section where I describe my sample selection composed of return migrants, key community members and authorities (key informants). Thirdly, I introduce the quantitative and qualitative sources of data used, after which I explain in detail the research techniques employed. Fourthly, I introduce the way in which I processed and analysed the data gathered. Finally, I discuss some of the ethical considerations as well as how my personal approach and positionality have influenced this research.

3.1. Fieldwork approach

The selection of sites for this research was influenced by Masferrer and Roberts' (2012) recommendation of conducting studies in Mexican non-traditional emigration areas with high levels of return in order to contribute to the development of a better understanding of the relationship between geographies of emigration and return⁴⁴, and migrants' challenges in terms of (re)integration. Furthermore, to address differences in local structural opportunities and constraints, the study was conducted in two contrasting localities, in the rural municipality of Huaquechula in the state of Puebla, and urban Mexico City.

While the Mixtec region of the state of Oaxaca (a region in a non-traditional state of migration with significant levels of emigration and return) was considered as an ideal first site to conduct this study in the initial phase of the research design, it was not included in the study following an initial exploration trip and further analysis of the socio-political environment. One important aspect which became evident only upon my arrival in the community was that local elections would take place in June 2015. This meant that I would conduct my fieldwork alongside the electoral campaigns and, it was likely, during election time. The Mixtec region of Oaxaca is a region where ethnic conflicts and old political rivalries, in addition to other important matters such as economic inequalities and corruption, have contributed to the deterioration of the social fabric and increased levels of violence. My experience confirms how relevant it is to conduct explorative field trips to assess the actual situation on the ground and avoid jeopardising the entire study.

Once this site was excluded, I began to consult diverse key informants (see Figure 3) as well as reviewing various sources of statistical data in order to identify other non-traditional emigration areas with high levels of return migration. After this consultation process and having spent time in Mexico City, my home town, it became evident that the city was a good case study worth investigating. Despite Mexico City being rated by the National Population Council (CONAPO 2010) as a location with a very low intensity emigration flow, data from 2015 showed a significant return flow. According to the National Institute of Migration,

⁴⁴ These authors have observed a change in the geography of return migration in Mexico, suggesting that differences in the stage of migration, e.g. traditional and non-traditional, influence the return patterns. In other words, these authors argue that migrants originally from non-traditional states of migration, due to their recent emigration, were not beneficiaries of 1986 amnesty, therefore have a greater propensity to return. Additionally, they argue that these states remain understudied, especially when it comes to their return flows.

Mexico City was ranked number 15 (out of 32) in relation to the number of deportees received (INM 2015).

Figure 3. Key informants consulted for field sites selection

Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla</i> (BUAP - Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla) • <i>Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla</i> (Iberoamerican University Puebla)
Non-government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Centro de Atención y Apoyo a Migrantes</i> (CAAM - Centre for Migrants' Support) • Dream in Mexico A.C. (Local NGO)
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dirección de Apoyo y Protección a Migrantes de Puebla</i> (DIRMP – Puebla State Office for Migrants' Support and Protection) • <i>Dirección de Atención a Huéspedes, Migrantes y sus Familias</i> (DAHMF – Mexico City Office for Migrants and their Families' Support)

Source: Fieldwork with key informants in Mexico

The second site, a rural one, was chosen while conducting the initial phase of my fieldwork in Mexico City. Through the administration of my survey questionnaire I was able to identify a pattern of return migrants who were originally from the neighbouring state of Puebla. As a next step, I reviewed figures of emigration and return to this state. Puebla has been rated by the CONAPO (2010) as a state with a medium intensity flow of emigration, and was ranked number five (5/32)⁴⁵ in relation to the number of deportees received in 2015 (INM 2015). To confirm the relevance of conducting this research in the state of Puebla, I consulted with key informants from the local governmental office (DIRMP - Puebla State Office for Migrants' Support and Protection) responsible for providing services to migrants and two academics from local universities (see Figure 3). These participants recommended looking at the region of Atlixco due to its high numbers of returnees. While conducting further

⁴⁵ Although there were other locations with higher rates of emigration and deportees, these were considered to be not suitable for conducting the research either for being traditional emigration states or not safe. The locations which had higher figures in relation to its deported population were Michoacán, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Guanajuato. For the cases of Michoacán and Guanajuato, these are traditional emigration states which do not qualify for the study. For the cases of Oaxaca and Guerrero, these are non-traditional states but it was unsafe to conduct research there at that time. Oaxaca was unstable due to the electoral times and Guerrero had ongoing clashes between organised crime, self-defence and government armed groups. Therefore, Puebla was chosen for being the only non-traditional state considered as safe within the top five states with higher number of deportees.

research, I came across data issued by the non-governmental organisation *Instituto de las Mujeres en la Migración* (IMUMI - Institute for Women in Migration) on children born in the USA and enrolled in basic education in Mexico (2014). As this data was disaggregated by state and municipalities, it was helpful in locating possible field sites. My assumption was that the localities with high numbers of US-born children like Huaquechula, would also host a significant number of returnees. After conducting further desk research, I concluded that the municipality of Huaquechula, in the Atlixco region, was the optimal locality to conduct the rural study due to its high rates of emigration, and its signs of a significant return. Therefore, both locations selected were non-traditional emigration places, with considerable numbers of return migrants (deportees), one being rural and one urban. Furthermore, Mexico City and Puebla are geographically located in the central region of the country which has been less studied as it is composed of non-traditional emigration states, located far from the border regions, and for not having a large indigenous population in this region. Therefore, conducting research where few studies have been undertaken is an added value of this work.

3.1.1. Accessing the fieldwork sites

Following the initial task of locating my two research sites, the next step was to identify and gain access to my research participants, both returnees and key informants. This, in a multi-sited research represents a twofold challenge. Return migrants constitute a specific segment of the population that can be difficult to locate as they may be spread out in various clusters within the overall population (Kuschminder 2017:27; van Hear 1998). Therefore, multiple access strategies were used to find participants and these varied slightly on the place of return. My main entry strategy was to conduct a questionnaire survey with the only objective of identifying my research participants and introduce the research to them. To do so, I targeted specific physical and virtual places where I could have access to returnees. Two other secondary strategies were finding participants through snowballing⁴⁶ or networking and, in a few cases, approaching those people who publicly self-identified as returnees.

The first selected location to carry out the questionnaire survey was the local governmental offices (DIRMP and DAHMF), responsible for providing services to migrants in Mexico City and Huaquechula. As these were governmental services, I had to follow the

⁴⁶ In snowball sampling once the researcher has access to participants, s/he essentially uses referrals from one participant to find new ones.

required protocol which seemed to be bureaucratic, therefore I was seriously concerned about its efficiency. Surprisingly, in both cases the entry strategy⁴⁷ worked well and I was granted an interview with the head of each office. During these meetings, I introduced myself and the research project, making particular efforts to explore if there was any interest from them in actively collaborating in this study, either in terms of data that they would want me to collect, or making further use of my research results to inform policy and practices. Despite my efforts, none of the interviewed authorities showed any interest in collaborating in this study. Nonetheless, I requested access to their waiting areas in order to administer my questionnaire and identify possible participants. Particularly in the case of Huaquechula, despite the fact that the local authority considered that this site was not pertinent for the study as he believed there was not a significant number of returnees in the town, he was willing to help. Consequently, I realised that for this field site it would be necessary to strengthen the snowballing strategy.

A second entry point in both sites was through non-governmental organisations providing services for returnees. In this case, the access was less bureaucratic due to previous connections I had with key actors. After a brief introduction to the project, the relevant staff were willing to introduce me to the returnees that they had contact with. Despite having access to fewer returnees, people were more willing to be interviewed, perhaps due to the pre-existing relationship of trust between them and the NGO.

While it proved to be the least successful, I had a third entry point. In the case of the urban site, I approached one of the largest call centres which employs a significant number of return migrants in the city⁴⁸. In the case of Huaquechula, I approached several public

⁴⁷ The strategy was to send an e-mail with a formal letter attached introducing myself and the research, followed up by the delivery of the hard copy of the letter at the premises of the institution targeted. In order to give more formality to my image as researcher, I also made some business cards including the university logo as well as my contact details. As a third step, I followed up through telephone calls.

⁴⁸ I consider that through this place I could have had access to a higher number of participants with more diverse origins (other than Mexico City) but they had little interest in being interviewed. On one hand, accessing this space required more time since I had to learn about returnees' sub-culture and social dynamics as well as gain their trust (e.g. many of the people working in these call centres are young people from the 1.5 generation who grew up in the USA so Spanglish is the main communication language and the use of slang is very common. Additionally, they use to socialise after working hours in local bars and restaurants to which I did not have access). On the other hand, it was hard to find returnees willing to be interviewed. Those who agreed in responding the questionnaire were not very interested in being interviewed and in several cases, they even gave me wrong contact details. Additionally, I also tried contacting the administration office of the call centre to get help distributing the online questionnaire survey, but I never got any reply to my e-mails.

schools within the municipality⁴⁹. In addition to these physical entry points, I approached returnees in virtual spaces such as Facebook. It was through this avenue that I identified three other entry points to participants. I will elaborate further on these strategies later in this chapter.

With regard to the snowballing technique, this was a method that was used in both sites but which proved to be more effective in the urban location. The typical process would be that my interviewee identified someone whom he or she would introduce me to. During my initial contact (either by phone or in person) with the potential participant, I introduced the study and checked the person's interest in being part of it. For those who showed interest in participating, I would then proceed to arrange the time and place of the interview. In the case of Huaquechula, many people, either participants or key informants, would identify returnees, provide me with their names (or in many cases just their nicknames) and information of where to locate them, but they often did not want to be identified as the source of information. In general, people were so cautious that they did not even want to be seen in public with me. Undoubtedly, the fact that on numerous occasions I approached returnees without being introduced by anyone, had a negative effect and people refused to be interviewed, or even answer the questionnaire.

Lastly, in the case of Mexico City I approached some participants directly who publicly self-identified as returnees through the mainstream media⁵⁰ or during public events in which I participated (see Figure 4). While participants identified in this manner were low in numbers, everyone accessed through this strategy agreed to participate in the study. During my time in both field sites I was always introduced to someone new or I discovered a new entry point which would provide me with access to more returnees. This experience leads me to believe that there is a significant presence of return migrants in both locations which merits further exploration.

Once the interviews with returnees were completed, I proceeded to contact my third group of interest, service providers and policy makers of both governmental organisations and civil society. My aim was to interview representatives of each of the governmental

⁴⁹ Authorities in two schools helped me to have indirect access to those households identified as having return migrants. I sent through the students the questionnaire survey and a letter explaining the research project and inviting people to participate in the study. Many questionnaires sent did not come back and I am almost sure that many of these questionnaires were filled in by the children themselves. In total, I was only able to access three interviewees through this channel.

⁵⁰ For an example see <http://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/may/17/deported-to-mexico-immigration-america>.

services or programmes identified as relevant by returnees, as well as those policy makers identified through my participation in various seminars (see Figure 4) or through interviews with other key informants. In order to access governmental officers, I used the same strategy mentioned earlier⁵¹ and managed to interview those in charge of services identified as the most relevant by returnees. In the case of civil society, as I have been working intermittently within the migration field in Mexico for approximately 10 years, people were aware of who I was and this facilitated access considerably.

Figure 4. Forums and seminars attended during fieldwork

Name of event	Organiser	Date
Seminar, The return of Mexican migrants from the USA to Michoacán, Oaxaca, Zacatecas, Puebla, Guerrero and Chiapas from 2000 to 2012: Building a comprehensive reintegration programme for migrants and their families.	Autonomous University of Zacatecas (UAZ) and the National Institute of Social Development (INDESOL)	February 22, 2015
Seminar, They have the voice, a dialogue with migrants' rights advocates.	Iberoamerican University, Mexico City	March 25, 2015
Seminar, Dreamers and USA children, citizens in exile with their deported parents in Mexico.	California and Mexico Project, and US Mexico Foundation	March 27, 2015
Seminar, Strategies of integration and reintegration of migrants to their host and home countries.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	July 15, 2015
Workshop, Social and productive integration/reintegration of migrants.	Ministry of the Interior	October 2015
Seminar, Return migration paths: young returnees (1.5 generation) working in Mexico City call centres.	Michael Da Cruz, COLEF	November 9, 2015

Source: Fieldwork with key informants in Mexico.

3.1.2. Difficulties accessing the fieldwork sites

In general, returnees' resistances to participate in this study were related to three main aspects, lack of time, lack of trust and lack of acknowledgement of the relevance of the topic.

⁵¹ Send an e-mail with a formal letter attached introducing myself and the research, followed up by the delivery of the hard copy of the letter with my business card at the premises, and finishing with follow-up phone calls and e-mails.

In relation to their lack of time, I expected it to be a constraint in Mexico City due to the well-known hectic urban lifestyle (long commutes, extended working hours or having more than one source of income, e.g. being employed and having one's own business); however I soon realised that the time constraint was also a concern in Huaquechula. Similarly to those in the city, people often needed to have more than one source of income. This, in many cases, was related to agriculture. As it was the beginning of the planting season, many of my participants had to spend long hours in the fields turning the soil and undertaking other preparations, and therefore had little time or energy to participate in my study.

With regard to trust, gaining access to the rural site required investing more time and effort than in Mexico City. Being an outsider in a small rural community is often more noticeable than in a larger city. Moreover, the presence of a stranger can often be interpreted as a threat. As anecdotal evidence, soon after my arrival, I was waiting for one of my research participants and sitting inside his business (a small bakery) when three police officers came and requested to see my ID, and to know the address of where I was staying. This took me by surprise and, as the police have such a bad reputation in Mexico, it also made me feel afraid. Therefore, even though I knew they had no reason to do this, I did as they asked. Once the initial tension was dissipated, I inquired as to the reason behind their requests. The officers replied that they checked on me because I was clearly an outsider and they wanted to have registry of my identity for security reasons. For these police officers (and perhaps other community members), my presence somehow represented a risk to their community and maybe to their personal safety⁵². Furthermore, some participants shared their fear of being victims of extortion⁵³, which apparently had been a problem in the community in the past.

Later, while conducting my interviews, I learnt that the reluctance to participate in the study was also related to concerns of being identified as 'failed returnees'. An indicator of success is the economic wealth that migrants were able to accumulate while in the USA, so for those who were unable to accumulate such wealth, they preferred to be unnoticed. Additionally, people who were deported also wanted to keep a low profile to avoid being exposed to public judgement. Therefore, people were concerned about the consequences

⁵² After this incident, and maybe as a consequence of it, the participant I was waiting for and was the owner of the bakery decided to cancel his participation in the research.

⁵³ One woman openly told me that she was afraid that I could make bad use of her information and kidnap her. This seemed odd since my physical appearance as a seven months pregnant woman would not align with the imagery of a criminal to me.

that disclosing the information about the nature of their return might have for them. Lastly, the lack of acknowledgement of the relevance of the topic made people feel doubtful about the significance of the research and the importance of their participation in the study.

Three different ways of dealing with these obstacles were firstly, the day after I was questioned by the police, I requested an official letter from the municipality stating that they 'authorised me' to live and conduct research in the locality (see Appendix 1). This letter proved to be a useful tool which I presented every time I was trying to gain access and people's trust. Secondly, during my stay in the community I was hosted by local residents whom I knew through personal connections. I realised that this elderly couple unintentionally became my guarantors in the eyes of the community⁵⁴. Despite the fact that by the end of my stay in Huaquechula I had to leave the house because the conditions of my stay were becoming problematic for conducting my research⁵⁵, this had no negative impact while completing my interviews. As for the lack of acknowledgement of the relevance of the topic, I realised that the way in which I conveyed the information about my research objectives was key for people to become aware of the importance of their participation in the investigation.

Rural communities are often conceived as organic and pure spaces to which outsiders may pose a threat, specifically to the moral and social health or wellbeing of the community (Ahmed 2000:26). Fear of difference is often projected onto the objects and spaces comprising the 'home' or locality which can be 'polluted' by the presence of non-conforming people, activities or artefacts (Ahmed 2000:53). Soon after my arrival in Huaquechula, I realised that I was not only perceived as non-conforming or a stranger, I also felt out of place, not knowing how to navigate an unknown environment which I soon perceived to be hermetic and hostile. I must say that I spent a considerable amount of time having to convince people that I was not a threat to them or their community and at a certain point I felt frustrated. In conclusion, I believe that accessing any field site calls for a high level of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983) on the part of the researcher. It is important not to under-estimate the creativity, effort, emotional labour, resilience and time required to

⁵⁴ Taking into account the concerns community members had about me as an outsider, I consider that staying with a couple who were in their early 80s and whose four of their children are migrants living in the USA, might have made me look as less of a threat.

⁵⁵ My hosts decided not to give me a key to enter their house and established curfew time by 20:30 hrs. Due to long interviews, a couple of times I came back later than the established hour and this was becoming problematic for my hosts.

conduct research, particularly in certain communities where the presence of an outsider could be initially (and understandably) unwelcome.

3.2. Sampling

My research design did not aim to achieve a representative sample of returnees currently living in Mexico City and Huaquechula. Therefore I established a quota of at least 60 interviews with returnees and 12 with governmental authorities and key community members, of which half would be in the rural site and half in the urban site. In the case of returnees, the established quota was accomplished. In the case of the key informants, the established quota was surpassed. I conducted seven more interviews than expected with authorities and key informants who were indirectly or directly involved with initiatives at a federal level.

I used the techniques previously mentioned to locate return migrants while aiming for diversity among them. Following Massey's and his colleagues (1987:308-309) criteria, the only requirement for returnees' to be interviewed was to have lived in the USA for more than three consecutive years and back in Mexico for at least one full year. By using purposive sampling methods, I have tried to capture a varied set of respondents in terms of age, marital status, gender, year of emigration, length of stay abroad, year of return, type of return and length of stay back in Mexico (see Figure 5). Interviewees were all adults, predominantly aged between 31 and 40, representing an economically active segment of the population. Even if it was not a requirement, I did try to achieve a balance of gender. While I did not achieve an exact balance, nor is the sample significantly unbalanced. The only substantial difference between genders is the smaller number of female interviewees in the rural site. This is consistent with research indicating that Mexican men are more likely to return than women (Appleby et al. 2009; Masferrer and Roberts 2012; Massey et al. 2015; Ravuri 2014; Reyes 2001; Velasco and Albicker 2013; Waddell and Fontenla 2015). Furthermore, despite there being no statistics which incorporate an accurate number of returnees (including those who were not removed from the USA) currently living in Mexico, the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (INM - National Institute of Migration), in its statistics of deportees received from the USA in 2015, indicates that of the total number of returnees only 15 percent in the case of Mexico City and 16 percent in the case of Puebla were women (INM 2015).

Most participants migrated to the USA during the 1990s and stayed for between 6 to 15 years. Due to the nature of the research, there was no requirement in terms of participants'

immigration status while in the USA, therefore the sample is composed of both documented and undocumented migrants.

Figure 5. Returnees' sample

Age	
20 to 30	9
31 to 40	24
41 to 50	14
51 to 60	7
61+	6
Gender	
Female	25
Male	35
Marital status	
Unmarried	12
Married/cohabiting	35
Divorced/widowed	13
Year of emigration to USA	
1970s	1
1980s	14
1990s	27
2000s	18
Immigration status USA	
Documented	10
Undoc / overstayed	50
Years in the USA	
3 to 5	6
6 to 10	19
11 to 15	17
16 to 20	10
21 to 25	6
26+	2
Year of return to Mexico	
1990s	1
2000 to 2005	12
2006 to 2010	23
2011 to 2014	24
Type of return	
Voluntary	8
Compelled	41
Forced	11
Place of return	
Huaquechula	30
Mexico City	30
Years in Mexico	
2 to 5	24
6 to 10	23
11 to 15	12
16 +	1

Source: Fieldwork with return migrants in Huquechla and Mexico City.

Documented migrants include permanent residents and naturalised US citizens; undocumented migrants include those who entered without documentation, those who entered with a tourist visa and overstayed, and those who worked in contravention of their conditions of entry. As will be discussed later, the sample was largely composed of undocumented migrants.

Regarding their return, most participants returned during the eight years previous to the study (2008 – 2014), therefore their stay in the country varied between two to ten years. The objective was also to have a balance between the type of return ('voluntary' or forced). In this regard, I realised that, as van Hear (1998) accurately observes, migrants' return movements have certain degrees of choice and coercion which cannot be portrayed in a 'voluntary-forced' dichotomy (see also Collyer 2012; Koch 2014; Webber 2011). Therefore, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, these two became four categories adding compelled return due to personal reasons and gendered life course constraints, and compelled due to structural constraints, as two types of return in which most of the sample fell (see Chapter 5).

3.3. Sources of data

Due to the nature of this study, I have made use of a variety of data sources, both primary and secondary, with the balance heavily weighted towards data derived from semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This sub-section briefly describes the data sources I used, as well as how and why I used them.

3.3.1. Quantitative data

As there is a dearth of integrated data regarding return migration patterns in Mexico, I consulted various sources to gain a proxy understanding of the figures, and to get a better sense of the volume of returnees per location. One initial source was the USA Department of Homeland Security (DHS) online statistics. This source was useful to get an overall understanding of USA-Mexico 'voluntary departure' and 'administrative removal' trends. Other selected quantitative data from specialised institutions, such the Pew Research Center and the International Organisation for Migration, were also used to obtain background information for this thesis. The specific selection of field sites (non-traditional emigration areas with high levels of return migration) was made based on national statistics issued by the National Institute for Migration and the National Population Council, along with

information issued by local institutions such as *Instituto de las Mujeres en la Migración* (previously mentioned).

3.3.2. Qualitative data

The tools used to gather qualitative data were questionnaire surveys, semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups, and field notes obtained first-hand through encounters with returnees and key informants. Other sources of data which I came across during the fieldwork were public seminars and other thematic events related to return migration to Mexico (see Figure 4), as well as more informal media outlets. The latter were particularly valuable due to their biographical nature. This data was used to supplement the information obtained through my encounters with returnees and key informants. As for the policy analysis, I used secondary data such as official policy documents and websites issued by the federal and local governments. These techniques will be addressed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

3.4. Data collection

Data collection for this study involved nine months of fieldwork between September 2014 and November 2015. Due to personal circumstances, I had to take two breaks, one at the beginning of my fieldwork, and the other at the end of it. It is important to mention that I conducted and completed the second phase of my fieldwork (migrants' questionnaire surveys and interviews) while pregnant which had several implications. These will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Gathering this data could only be completed by trying various techniques; those that I share in the following paragraphs were the most effective. All of the data collected using these methods was in the Spanish language, with the exception of a couple of online questionnaire surveys completed in English and a couple of interviews conducted in 'Spanglish'⁵⁶.

3.4.1. Questionnaire survey

By using a questionnaire survey, I was able to identify some of my research participants by inquiring about: i) people's migration movements; ii) the number of years lived in the USA and in Mexico upon their return; iii) basic information about their reasons for return; iv)

⁵⁶ A hybrid language combining words and idioms from both Spanish and English used by many young returnees.

biographic data and contact details (see Appendix 2). At the completion of the questionnaire, if qualified, I introduced the research objectives and participants were asked about their interest in participating in an interview, as well as if they could identify anyone else who potentially could qualify and be interested in participating in the study. The questionnaire was conducted face-to-face in the physical locations mentioned earlier (the offices of the governmental and non-governmental services in both locations as well as outside one of the call centres in Mexico City). The questionnaire survey was also conducted with those participants who were identified through the snowball technique in either of the field sites; the purpose of doing so was to confirm that the person qualified to participate in the research and that he or she was interested in doing so. Additionally, I developed a modified version of this questionnaire which was circulated online through social media (Facebook) and sent to organisations that target a specific group of young returnees for its dissemination. This revised version of the questionnaire was developed in both languages, Spanish and English, to accommodate its target (mostly bilingual) population and was shortened to adapt to its online distribution. Despite the fact that in other cases (see Crush et al. 2012 on diaspora studies), online survey methods have proved to be a successful way in which to contact a significant number of participants, in this case it had an extremely limited scope⁵⁷. In the case of Huaquechula, the questionnaire was modified for self-administration and was sent to children's households identified by school authorities. In total, I administrated 214 questionnaires, of which 116 were collected in Mexico City and 98 in Huaquechula.

3.4.2. Semi-structured in-depth interview schedule

The semi-structured in-depth interview proved to be a suitable tool for researching migrants' life experiences (see Sanchez-Ayala L. 2012; Weiss 1994). Additionally, complementary interviews were conducted with identified key community members and governmental authorities. As an initial step, I designed an interview schedule for returnees encompassing open-ended and structured (multiple choice) questions. The questions contained in this schedule inquire about migrants' sociodemographic characteristics and migration movements, focusing on their (re)integration experiences (see Appendix 3). Its sequence was conceived in a way that helps to reconstruct the migration histories of the respondents, and was structured to take the interviewees through their experiences in each integration dimension (structural, social, cultural, civic and political) while in the USA and upon their

⁵⁷ A total of 16 questionnaires were collected through this tool.

return to Mexico, exploring aspects that facilitated or hindered their process, and the impact of experiences in one integration domain upon those in another.

As for the key community members and governmental authorities, I developed an interview guide to be used as a reference which covered issues around i) policies; ii) current programming; as well as iii) perceptions of the current and future situation in relation to returnees. These questions were modified to adapt to the nature of the institution and the position of each interviewee (see Appendix 4).

These three research tools (questionnaire survey, semi-structured in-depth interview schedule and key informant interview guide) were originally designed in English and subsequently translated into Spanish. During the translation, special thought was given not only to the pertinence of the questions and, in some cases, its multiple-choice answers, but also to the specific formulation used in each language. Particular attention was paid to matching concepts and meanings rather than doing a literal translation. Following the translation of the semi-structured in-depth interview schedule, I conducted a total of three interviews with return migrants in Mexico City during the pilot phase of the fieldwork. After this initial phase, the research tool was modified according to the identified needs. Similarly, the key informant interview guide was discussed with an 'on the ground' colleague who was familiar with the key informants and was aware of the local politics. As a result, I created a revised version of the guide ready for use.

In a second phase of data collection, a total of 60 return migrants were interviewed, 30 in Mexico City and 30 in Huaquechula. With the exception of three cases, interviews were held in one session. The average time of the interview was two and a half hours, but ranged from one and a half, to up to six hours. All in-depth interviews, except for one, were voice recorded with the consent of the respondents, but notes were taken as well in a printed interview schedule for each case. An average interview with a returnee started with an introduction of the research and its objectives, which were communicated by reading through the information sheet (see Appendix 5), followed by an explanation and signature of the consent form (see Appendix 6). The next step was to gather the bio-data information followed by an overview of the whole migration trajectory. Authors have highlighted the importance of exploring temporal dimensions in migration research as it has an impact on migrants' settlement experience and return considerations (Erdal and Ezzati 2015). Therefore, utilising a timeline, I asked each participant to share all of her or his migration experiences with me, both national and international. The use of this timeline had a similar

function to the migration history chart proposed by Carling (2012). The procedure was to draw a line on which I placed 2015 at the end, and I requested that the participant share the date on which their migration journey started and their destination. This would be followed by a sequence of dates and destinations of their subsequent migration movements, ending with the date of their return and destination(s). As I allowed space for each participant to narrate freely, sometimes people gave calendar years, others preferred to refer to the age they were when they migrated and others used specific life events to prompt their memories (for an example see Appendix 7). These life events would often be mentioned later in their narrations as important experiences in their life trajectories. Typical references would be made to their arrival to the USA before or after President Bush Senior passed the amnesty in the 1980s, or before or after 9/11. A more personal remark, for example, was made by a participant who mentioned that he and his family left Mexico in 1987, just after the football World Cup, which was one of the best memories of his childhood. The use of this tool was helpful to establish a frame of reference and by the end of this exercise I had an overall picture of the participant's migration movements, which also helped me to adjust the time and my role as required⁵⁸.

Once the returnees' interviews were finished, I was able to identify relevant actors to be interviewed. Therefore, 19 complementary interviews were conducted with key community members and governmental authorities such as researchers (4), government authorities (8), and non-governmental actors (7)⁵⁹. These interviewees responded to various questions during semi-formal interviews held in the two research sites. Specifically, the aim of these interviews was to learn more about contextual aspects such as (re)integration policies and practices, as well as the role of state institutions and other actors that influence the (re)integration experience of return migrants to Mexico (see Figure 6). Interview schedules were used with much more flexibility, due to the need to adopt an exploratory, open-ended questioning approach. Some questions also appeared pertinent in some instances, but not necessarily in others, as readiness to respond varied from person to person. I must say that I particularly struggled when interviewing governmental officials as they would generally have an extremely institutional approach, basing their responses on official statements

⁵⁸ Interviewees with just one migration journey would generally require less time than those with several ones for which I would also need to have a more directive approach as interviewer.

⁵⁹ It is relevant to mention that these interviews were conducted in addition to those initial ones conducted during the process of selecting field sites. This means that a few actors were interviewed twice.

which were often far from reality, and failed to reflect the situation on the ground. For this group, just half of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents either due to their request or because I did not consider it appropriate, but in all cases notes were taken.

Figure 6. Key community members and governmental authorities interviewed

Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fundación Banco Bilbao Viscaya Argentaria</i> / Bilbao Viscaya Argentaria Bank Foundation (BBVA) • Independent researcher • Independent researcher • <i>Universidad Iberoamericana Guadalajara</i> / Iberoamerican University Guadalajara
Non-government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Alianza para las Migraciones Centroamérica y México</i> / Central American and Mexico Migration Alliance (CAMMINA) • <i>Asamblea Popular de Familias Migrantes</i> / Popular Assembly of Migrant Families (APOFAM) • <i>Fundación Mexicanos y Americanos Todos Trabajando</i> / Mexicans and Americans Thinking Together Foundation (MATT) • <i>Iniciativa Ciudadana para la Promoción de la Cultura del Dialogo</i> / Citizen's Initiative for the Promotion of a Culture of Dialogue • <i>Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración</i> / Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI) • International Organisation for Migration – México (IOM Mexico) • <i>Servicio Jesuita para Migrantes Puebla</i> / Jesuit Service for Migrants Puebla (SJM Puebla)
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dirección de Apoyo y Protección a Migrantes de Puebla</i> / Puebla State Office for Migrants' Support and Protection • <i>Dirección General de Protección al Migrante y Vinculación, Instituto Nacional de Migración</i> / General Office for Migrant's Protection and Networking, National Institute for Migration (INM) • <i>Oficina de Atención al Migrante, Huaquechula</i> / Office for Migrants, Huaquechula • <i>Dirección General de Políticas de Protección, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores</i> / General Office for Protection Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) • <i>Dirección General para la Salud del Migrante, Secretaría de Salud</i> / General Office for Migrant's Health, Ministry of Health (SS) • <i>Dirección de Movilidad Laboral, Servicio Nacional de Empleo</i> / Office for Labour Mobility, National Service of Labour (SNE) • <i>Presidencia Municipal Huaquechula</i> / Huaquechula's Municipal President • <i>Subsecretaría de Planeación y Evaluación de Políticas Educativas, Secretaría de Educación Pública</i> / Office for Planification and Evaluation of Education Policies, Ministry of Education (SEP)

Source: Fieldwork with key informants in Huaquechula and Mexico City.

The places where the returnees' interviews were conducted varied from one location to another. In the urban site, the majority of the interviews (18) were conducted after working

hours in public spaces such as service providers' offices, restaurants, parks, and in some cases in rather unsuitable locations such as in a subway station, or a beauty salon. All other interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. In the rural site, the majority of the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes (16), others were conducted during working hours at the interviewees' work place (11) and just three of them were conducted in public spaces. The majority of key informants' interviews were held at their work places.

I am aware that interviewees, when talking about their lives, are selective in terms of which events they consider to be relevant and the ways in which they choose to narrate them (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Moreover, it was important for me to keep in mind that the ways in which interviewees communicate their stories are influenced by their positions as migrants, key community members or policy makers. Their experiences were communicated in diverse ways according to their specific personal, cultural and social contexts. Interviewing a range of actors has enriched this study by capturing their views on the post-return experience and has helped me to understand a diverse and challenging reality (Kvale 1996).

Even if I conducted only the number of interviews on the sample quota as initially planned, I believe that I interviewed participants until reaching a saturation point. While every returnee's life narrative shared with me was unique, I am confident that when I completed the data collection I was at a point where similar issues were being raised by various participants. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, rather than seeking statistically based generalisability, this study aimed to extract a detailed understanding of migrants' experiences of return based on their functional and subjective experiences related to their (re)integration processes. I am confident that through the methodology established I have been able to generate that understanding.

3.4.3. Focus groups

I conducted three focus groups (see Bloor et al. 2001), one in Mexico City and two in Huaquechula. The focus group in Mexico City was organised by a non-governmental organisation that helped me, in the first place, to access interviewees. This organisation runs a support group which meets regularly to discuss different matters of their concern. Although it was not a requirement, the ten attendants of that session were female, of whom three had participated as interviewees. The other two groups were conducted in Huaquechula and participants included both returnees and non-migrants, including government officials and service providers. In this site particularly, I faced reluctance from my interviewees to

participate in gatherings, which might be related to the obstacles mentioned earlier in this chapter. On the one hand, people expressed reluctance to participate in a group where they would be identified as returnees, and on the other, some people mentioned that they had no available time to spend on this activity. Other authors have written about local communities' involvement in research and confirm that participants may be highly sceptical as to whether it is worth investing their time and energy in studies, particularly if it seems to offer little in terms of direct or immediate benefit to them (see Cornwall and Jewkes 1995). In the case of Huaquechula, I believe that the focus group experience was even more fruitful due to the participation of non-migrants in the group, therefore, I was able to gather new information.

The focus groups were conducted three months after the completion of returnees' interviews and followed an initial and general analysis of the data. There were two main objectives of these focus groups. The first objective was to feed back some of the initial results of the study to the community in order to both share the data generated, as well as to promote a sense of ownership of the data and their self-identification as returnees. The second objective was to corroborate the information gathered and to receive feedback on matters that the group considered relevant to explore.

These groups were a good opportunity to confirm the data presented and deepen my understanding in some specific issues migrants experience upon return. In the focus group held in Mexico City the discussion focused on issues faced by women, particularly how they often become single mothers upon return, and their struggles to find employment. In Huaquechula the debate in the focus groups was related to returnees' participation in gangs and how they were often blamed for the insecurity experienced in the community. More on these findings will be discussed later in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.4.4. Field notes

In addition to these diverse research methods, I took reflexive notes in each printed interview schedule and in a fieldwork journal. These notes helped me to reflect on issues such as emotional and behavioural reactions of both participants and myself, on the overall atmosphere of the interviews or other activities, and on the similarities and differences between the field research sites. Writing down emerging topics and fresh impressions after each interview has been particularly useful while analysing the data collected. Additionally, reading and reflecting about my daily activities such as commuting in both localities, attending a ceremony in a local school in Huaquechula, or spending long hours at the governmental offices in Mexico City, enabled me to learn more about my interviewees' social

realities and dynamics. These field notes also helped me to reflect and record the way in which my identities as a highly educated Mexican woman and ‘mother-to-be’, a psychosocial worker, a migrants’ rights advocate, a researcher and migrant influenced my interactions and perceptions of the field and of my participants.

3.4.5. Additional information

As mentioned previously, I participated in six forums and seminars in which various factors of return migration were discussed among researchers, governmental and non-governmental organisations (see Figure 4). Participation in these forums enabled me to gather data related to the current situation faced by returnees, as well as to observe dynamics among the different actors involved. In addition to the sources of information previously mentioned, there are two further sources which I used to learn more about a specific group, the life experiences of young (1.5 generation) returnees in Mexico. One source is an edited book of life stories of young Mexicans who returned both ‘voluntarily’ and forcibly to their home country (see Anderson and Solis 2014). The other source is two online blogs⁶⁰ developed by young returnees during their post-return lives in Mexico. These two sources are particularly useful as they share very detailed, personal and insightful accounts of returnees’ return and (re)integration experiences.

3.5. Processing and analysing the data

All interviews and field notes were transcribed and translated from Spanish into English. Following this first step, the information was then entered into a database to allow for analysis and interpretation. The data was then organised and colour coded based on the same five sections (bio data, pre-return, return, (re)integration, contributions, current policies and programming) established in the interview schedule. Each section was then thoroughly analysed, a process that I started by aggregating the data into categories that captured key themes mentioned repeatedly. A second level of analysis was recognising the intersections between each domain of integration (while in the USA and upon their return to Mexico) and other aspects such as returnees’ sociodemographic characteristics, or place and type of return. As lines of causality were not always clear, there are some intersections in the analysis that emerge more clearly than others. As stated previously by Spencer and

⁶⁰ See Mundo Citizen <http://mundocitizen.com/about-mundocitizen/> and Dreams Beyond Borders <https://dreamsbeyondborders.wordpress.com/growing-up-in-dallas-my-hometown/>

Charsley, these challenges are commonly faced when attempting to capture the complexity of the integration processes (2016).

Part of the analysis included triangulation of returnees' interview data with that of key informants' and the desk review. Data that became crucial for this analysis was a detailed description of key socio-economic and cultural aspects of the contexts in the two localities of study. A thorough account of the context in Huaquechula and Mexico City is important as it helps to develop an enhanced understanding of participants' decisions to emigrate and return, as well as their (re)integration processes and experiences. This is consistent with Creswell's assertion that the description of the setting is essential to case study analysis (2007).

3.6. Ethical considerations

In planning and carrying out my research I followed the University of Sussex 'Code of Practice of Research' (2017) and I made an effort to implement the principles of the 'Research Ethics Guidebook' based on the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC 2015) framework: i) integrity and quality; ii) fully inform participants; iii) confidentiality and anonymity; iv) voluntary participation, free from coercion; v) avoiding harm and; vi) independence and impartiality of the researchers. In the following section, I briefly elaborate on how I managed three key ethical issues: voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality. I then reflect on my personal approach and positionality in this research.

3.6.1. Voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in addition to identifying potential participants, the questionnaire survey also became a way of introducing my research. Along with the completion of the questionnaire, I provided an information sheet (see Appendix 5) where I introduced the objective of the research, described the type of interview to be conducted and, most importantly, explained confidentiality issues. After providing the initial introduction, I asked if the participant was interested in participating and, if so, I collected their contact details in order to call them at a later date and set up an appointment for the interview. This gap between the meeting and the phone call would act, if necessary, as a 'cooling off period', allowing potential participants to make their excuses if they did not want to take part (Oeppen 2009:61). Of the total number of people who replied to the questionnaire, a minority did not qualify as participants (36), and the vast majority decided not to participate (118): either they

did not share their contact details with me, I was unable to contact them, or after contacting them, they decided not to participate in the study. Taking these numbers into account, I can conclude that people did not feel obligated to agree to take part in the study, and those who did participate did so of their free will. Initially I was concerned about having a biased sample as I thought that only those returnees who considered themselves to have been 'successful' or who came back 'voluntarily' had agreed to participate. However, following the analysis I can conclude that, in relation to their type of return, I achieved a diverse sample where the majority considered their return as compelled (see Figure 5).

An early thought to enhance participation was that I could provide an incentive⁶¹ for all participants who agreed to take part in my research; however, after consulting with key informants this idea was discarded. As mentioned earlier, this research was conducted alongside electoral campaigns in both sites. Unfortunately, clientelist exchange of material rewards for political support is still a mainstream practice in Mexico. Therefore, key informants considered that providing incentives to promote returnees' participation in this study could have been associated with these political practices. They asserted that these incentives could either have forced the participation of people who would not have otherwise agreed to participate, or discouraged participants that would have liked to participate, thinking this study was linked to any political group. Nonetheless, while I did not advertise this beforehand, every time an interview was conducted in a restaurant or cafeteria I covered the cost, more as a gesture of gratitude than an incentive for participation.

In relation to participants' consent, as the use of the written 'consent form' proved not to be problematic during the pilot interviews, it was utilised prior to every interview in both sites. As described earlier, after reviewing the information sheet the participant would have time to review and sign the consent form. This consent form explained that participants could withdraw from the study at any time and if so, all information provided would be destroyed and removed from the project; that the information provided would only be used for the purpose of academic research and its dissemination products; that particulars and names mentioned by participants would be changed in those cases when it was requested; and that privacy regulations according to the UK Data Protection Act 1998 would be observed (see Appendix 6). While only four participants requested the change of their names, while writing up this thesis I decided to change the names of all participants to help preserve their

⁶¹ Either financial retribution or a token gift such as a meal in a restaurant or a ticket for the cinema.

anonymity. Additionally, whenever I thought that the information given may help to identify a research participant I have also modified it, or avoided including specific data. By the end of the procedure, the participant would keep a form that I had signed which stated the agreements established, as well as my contact details in case there were further questions or concerns, and I would keep the signed consent form of the participant which was attached to each participant's interview schedule.

In the case of key informants, while I raised the matter of confidentiality at the beginning of each interview, it became clear that this was not a major issue for the majority of the respondents, especially for those in governmental positions. This is probably due to the fact that people who are in high positions of authority and responsibility are often considered 'public' people, and their responses were aligned with official positions. While there were no concerns from the participants' side, names and positions were not included in the thesis, but rather only the institution that they are part of.

3.7. My personal approach and positionality

While I am aware that I will never be able to fully understand the influence of my personal approach and positionality on my relationship with my research participants, the process of gathering data, as well as on my interpretation and analysis of it, in the following paragraphs I will elaborate on some of the factors that I consider to be the most evident and which might have had the most impact in this study.

With regard to my personal approach, two main aspects that influenced this research were my own life experience as a migrant, and my background as service provider and migrants' rights advocate working in the non-governmental sector for approximately 10 years. During my role as a service provider, I developed knowledge, experience and a proactive problem-solving approach when supporting migrants' efforts to integrate into their host communities. This professional and personal commitment created an ethical dilemma while in my researcher capacity. On more than one occasion I was faced with situations where my interviewees were in need of legal advice, information about access to jobs or a relevant service. For most researchers, this would not be an issue as they might not have had the ability to do anything about it. However, I was not only a researcher but also a practitioner and I possessed both information and networks that I could make use of to support my research participants. Despite the need to act as a researcher (and receive information) and not as a service provider (who could provide information), ultimately my

identity as a psychosocial worker overcame the researcher identity and I decided to either provide my interviewees with the information they needed, or support them to access the required services.

As for my experience as a migrant, living outside of my country of origin for more than seven years has given me what Carling and colleagues have called an 'insider' perspective (2014). The fact that my participants could see me as another migrant like them (an insider) was particularly useful in those cases where people felt the need to criticise Mexican culture or Mexicans in general. Specifically, in the case of Huaquechula, this co-migrant (insider) perspective was also helpful to lessen my image as an outsider from Mexico City. Furthermore, as a migrant I have experienced being undocumented, detained, deported and having to return to Mexico at a time and under certain conditions that I did not expect. Despite this experience not being comparable to those of some of my participants while in the USA, it has enabled me to develop a better understanding of the personal (especially emotional) process people go through when faced with a forced return, and how this affects their post-return lives. Furthermore, this experience allowed me to manage delicate interactions with research participants and to better anticipate ethical considerations. While my experience of deportation was not something I shared with all participants, in order to ease the interview process, I did share it with those deportees who struggled talking openly about their experience.

The aspects of my identity that I consider having potentially influenced my data collection are being a highly educated (doctorate student) Mexican woman who was visibly pregnant while conducting the fieldwork. As diverse scholars have already pointed out, the researcher holds a privileged position of power by having (an apparent) control of the process by deciding the research questions, directing the flow of the interactions, interpreting the data, and deciding where and in what form it should be presented (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Being a woman and holding this position of power in a patriarchal society such as the Mexican one is a factor which separated me from my interviewees, particularly the men. While my role as researcher could have portrayed me as an intimidating person, I became aware that being pregnant had a neutralising effect. Pregnancy is a physical condition with broad cultural meanings. In the Mexican culture there is the perception that pregnant women are vulnerable and in need of protection and care, therefore the intimidating image described above might have been lessened. In addition to this, I consider that the fact that my pregnancy itself disclosed personal information without me having any control over it,

combined with my open attitude to further inquiries regarding my family life, positioned me in a similar or, at least a closer, situation to the one of my interviewees who were being questioned by me (see Reich 2003). A final aspect to highlight is the fact that by being pregnant, I was no longer sexualised in a way that invited flirtation. Particularly, I found it useful in a more traditional setting such as Huaquechula where my interest in men's lives and my willingness to spend long hours talking to them in private could be misinterpreted by the community as 'romantic' interest. I can conclude that this experience as a pregnant woman allowed me to reflect upon my own body, on how I interacted with my research participants, and informed my interpretation of our interactions.

3.8. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have discussed methodological considerations that are relevant to my research. These considerations include my fieldwork approach, selection of participants, the technicalities of the data collection and its analysis, as well as how ethical considerations, my personal approach and positionality have influenced this study. Moreover, throughout the writing process of this thesis I kept methodological and ethical considerations in mind, aiming to produce research based on the principles of integrity and quality, and avoid misrepresentation and over-simplification of my participants' life experiences. Additionally, during this chapter I had the opportunity to reflect on my positionality and concluded that this has been in constant flow and shifted from being a 'practitioner' to a being a researcher and advocate of migrants' rights, to an 'insider co-migrant', to a 'vulnerable pregnant student'.

Through this reflexive process I also developed my awareness of how these multiple positions were in interplay during the whole research process, having a different impact at various times. Specifically, with regard to my fieldwork phase, considering the reluctance of people to participate and the situation of insecurity in the country, I can conclude that these identities provided me with access to my research sites and participants which may have otherwise been impossible. With regard to my writing phase, these positions and experiences have been complementary by widening my perspective and hopefully making me stronger academically.

4. The emigration journey and life in the USA

I guess I can say that I left [Mexico] because I wanted to join my boyfriend... I knew this guy from my childhood, he left [to the USA] because he was unable to access university here. Then, he came back for a year and that is when we started the relationship. When he was about to leave again [to the USA], he invited me to join him. At that time, I was studying my bachelors' but I told him 'Let's do it! I will go with you and stay for six months, then I will come back to finish my degree [...]' He paid for the [tourist] visa; the whole process to get it took me around one year [...] I never imagined we would take so long to come back [...] At that time I had family problems at home, my mother had separated from her second husband, and as the eldest [child] I felt I had to help my siblings [financially]. Maybe unconsciously I wanted to leave because I did not want to face those conflicts at home [...] Hmmm, now that I went through all this long story I would say I left because I wanted to join my boyfriend, make money to help my siblings and be away from my family problems.

Susana's interview excerpt illustrates the diversity of my participants' motivations and pressures to migrate to the USA, where the well-known financial incentives were often intertwined with other personal, gendered life course and contextual aspects (Bujan 2015). Upon her arrival in the USA, Susana's expectations of rapidly finding a well remunerated job clashed with the reality that she found. Therefore, six months turned into one year and then into two; ultimately becoming a stay of almost nine years. During her stay in the USA, Susana managed to access services, find various jobs, develop a strong support network on both sides of the border, and learn some English. Despite her undocumented status, Susana felt that she managed to integrate in the USA and described feeling "happy and free" during those years. These feelings were echoed by other interviewees, who described through their stories how they managed to fully integrate into the American society, while others felt more like "second class citizens."

This is the first of four chapters which introduce my findings and interpretations of the fieldwork conducted in Huaquechula, Puebla and Mexico City. The chapters are sequenced in a way that reflect the chronological journey of my research participants, from their pre-return experiences (departure from Mexico and integration while in the USA), through their convoluted motivations and journeys of return, to their post-return experiences of (re)integration in Mexico. This chapter focuses on the pre-return stage. As part of the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 2, this research approaches integration as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. While this framework will be utilised further to analyse migrants' (re)integration experiences upon their return to Mexico, it will also be used as a reference while analysing my participants' life experiences in the USA.

The current chapter starts with a summary of general information about my participants' sociodemographic characteristics upon departure from Mexico, followed by a section where I describe their migration journeys to the USA, and a third where I discuss their expectations and motivations to remain in their host country. In the subsequent section, based on the '(re)integration framework' proposed in Chapter 2, I focus on participants' integration processes while in the USA, utilising the different dimensions proposed (structural, civil and political, social and cultural). Lastly, I elaborate on returnees' assessment of their integration process based on how they perceive their own human wellbeing while in the USA.

While 'Latino' and 'Hispanic' are often used interchangeably among my participants, the term 'Latino' is used in this thesis as a pan-ethnic identifier of people of Latin American origin living in the USA. For the purposes of this analysis, respondents who were born in a Latin American country and/or self-identified as Latino, Hispanic, or a specific Latin American nationality (e.g. Mexican, Salvadoran) were classified as Latino, with the exception of the quotes where the participant used another term. It is important to highlight that in the coming chapters whenever extracts from the migrant interviews are quoted, I give the pseudonym of the interviewee, the location of the interview (MC for Mexico City, H for Huaquechula), and the participants' age at the time of the interview.

4.1. Migrants' sociodemographic characteristics

As mentioned in Chapter 3, in relation to the gender distribution of the sample, I achieved a degree of balance with 25 female and 35 male. With regard to age, a vast majority of participants migrated at a young age. Almost half of them were under 18 years old, the other half were young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. People migrating as mature adults (over 36 years old) were a minority but, as the majority of participants in this group were women, their life stories were particularly valuable in expanding my understanding of the migration experience beyond the stereotypical 'young, unmarried, male' case. When analysing the intersection between age and place, I found significant differences. When looking at the age of migration of those living in Mexico City, I found a higher number of people who had migrated as children or mature adults, than as young adults. For example, Moises (MC, 30) left 'home' as a two months old baby and Maria Luisa (MC, 64) travelled at the age of 57 after retiring and "finishing with her duties as mother and wife". In the case of Huaquechula, the majority of participants migrated as young adults.

Regarding gendered life course aspects, from the total number of participants, almost two-thirds were unmarried at the time of their first migration to the USA. Amongst those who were married, it was more common for men to migrate alone, leaving their children and wives in Mexico. In contrast, married women typically migrated with their husbands prior to having children. This finding might be related to restrictions that unmarried women face when migrating on their own in a patriarchal culture as such as that which exists in Mexico, and with the risks associated with crossing the border undocumented (e.g. being kidnapped and/or sexually assaulted by authorities or criminal groups operating along the border). In this regard Mariana (H, 35) said: "I had a brother in the USA, I always wanted to join him but my parents did not allow me [...] As my brother had been there for some years, I could see how he was doing well, so I wanted to make money like him! When I got married, I did not depend on my family anymore, so, I decided to go there [the USA] with my husband."

As mentioned above, the majority of participants migrated at an early stage of life, therefore it was not surprising to observe low levels of education among this group. Most participants had received either primary or secondary level education, or none at all. Those with further studies migrated with a high school education or technical studies qualifications, and very few migrated with a bachelor or masters' education, which in some cases was incomplete. The numbers of participants with each level of education are similar in both sites. The difference, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, is that contrary to the case of migrants from Huaquechula, almost a quarter of those from Mexico City continued with their education while in the USA. Another significant aspect is that the vast majority of research participants had very basic levels of English language upon their departure. Interestingly, many participants seemed quite surprised by how difficult it was to navigate their new lives in the USA while only speaking Spanish. During the interviews, participants gave accounts of feeling anxious due to their (surprisingly) unexpected language barrier. In the words of Pilar (MC, 39) "once you finally get there [USA] you realise you cannot communicate. I remember thinking, now how will I manage to get a job if I do not even speak the language?"

Another relevant aspect that is linked to a participant's age upon migration is their occupation prior to departure. As expected, many of the participants who were under 18 were students at the time that they migrated. Many of those who left as teenagers talked about having dropped out of school, either due to financial complications, inability to access university education or lack of motivation to pursue higher education. Particularly in the rural

site, perhaps the nature of the migratory culture in the region, high rates of unemployment and the prevalence of occupations linked to the primary sector, as well as the well-known deficiencies in the educational system, explain these attitudes and behaviour with respect to schooling (Marroni 2003:137). As Roberto (H, 40) said, “I dropped out of school, I felt it was not worth it... I would study and then what? What would I do after finishing?” Of the participants that were working prior to migrating to the USA (and were predominantly from the rural site), only one interviewee was formally employed as a teacher, and requested time off from work while in the USA. The vast majority of participants were working in the informal sector; the activities most mentioned were domestic work and agricultural workers. As the informal sector did not provide financial stability, they decided to migrate.

4.2. The emigration journey

Whereas the majority of participants had made just one or two long trips, there were several who had crossed the border multiple times. The few women among this group travelled with tourist visas and went back to Mexico very often, usually before spending six months in the USA which is the maximum amount of time that any tourist can remain in the country. For example, Susana (MC, 35) returned to Mexico every six months for five years, and it was not until she had a baby that she decided to overstay in the USA for four years. Male participants who reported crossing the border multiple times were either using the ‘proper’ documents (residency permits), or they migrated during 1980s or 1990s when crossing without documents was easier, less expensive and safer. It is interesting to observe that none of the participants reported crossing the border multiple times without documentation after 2000, and those who mentioned several attempts to cross reported doing so because they had been apprehended by immigration officials at the border and sent back to Mexico (the so-called ‘hot returns’). Within my sample, there were no participants who had the experience of attempting to enter the USA without documents after being deported after living in the USA.

Another interesting aspect is that in Huaquechula, there were some cases in which I could observe the ‘trampoline effect’, where internal migration led to international migration (King and Skeldon 2010:1623). In their study “Integrating Approaches to Internal and International Migration”, King and Skeldon explain that their initial internal movement enables rural migrants to familiarise themselves with the urban environment of their own country before venturing abroad on a subsequent international migration (for the Mexican

case see Cornelius 1992 and Rivera-Sánchez 2007). The few participants involved in this type of migration did not mention that their initial plan was to go to the USA. Rather, it was not until they were faced with changed life circumstances that they decided to migrate. For example, Berenice (H, 47) travelled to Mexico City when she was 12 years old to work as domestic worker. It was not until eight years later when her brother proposed that she move to the USA that she decided to travel, encouraged by the idea of earning more money to support her mother and eight siblings.

As mentioned previously, the majority of my research participants entered the USA without the required authorisation. Only three participants migrated with residency permits as they were direct beneficiaries of the documents their parents obtained due to the 1986 amnesty. Seven others travelled with tourist visas and either returned every six months as Susana did, or overstayed with the knowledge that once they left the USA, it would be almost impossible to obtain a new visa due to their 'bad record'. For example, Mauricio (H, 60), who travelled with a tourist visa, overstayed for nearly four years. During his stay in the USA he saved as much money as possible and left the country knowing that he would never return, at least with a visa.

Other than this group of 10, the rest of my research participants travelled to the USA without documents and remained undocumented. During their interviews, people described a wide range of conditions under which they migrated. A straightforward journey would be the one experienced by Julia (MC, 68), where upon her arrival to Tijuana (city which shares a border with San Diego, California) she contacted the *coyote* (smuggler) that her nephew recommended. The smuggler provided her with another person's documents, styled her hair and makeup to make her look like the person in the identification photo, and helped her to successfully cross *por la línea* (through the regular check point), as any other documented migrant would, without any significant incident. Other stories describe much more complicated and dangerous journeys which include being lost in the desert for days, hiding in a sewage canal for hours, being chased by the border patrol agents with trained dogs, and/or being apprehended and deported more than once. Narrations were often embedded with sentiments of fear, pain, excitement, pride and sadness, among others. Participants mentioned that, due to their past experiences of crossing the border, the majority has decided not to go back to the USA undocumented, a point which I will discuss further in Chapter 7. These findings seem to support other authors' findings (González-Barrera 2015;

Passel et al. 2012) which highlight the reduction of undocumented Mexico-USA border crossings in recent years.

In addition to the risks involved in the undocumented journey, another source of stress mentioned by participants was the large debt that people acquired to pay for smugglers' fees. The common practice is that people borrow money from relatives and, once they get to the USA and find a job, they pay this money back. While this 'chain migration' facilitates people's journeys and perpetuates the migration cycle, various participants described it as a heavy burden upon arrival as it extends the period during which they cannot send money to their family and relatives back home, as they must first pay off this debt. As we will see in the following section, many participants faced mixed emotions and complications immediately after their arrival, which made more than one participant doubt their intention to stay in the USA. Juan (H, 49), when talking about his first arrival to the USA, says: "The arrival was harder than expected, after all you are finally there... all you wanted was to be there, you know? But once there, you realise that you have nothing, no wife, no children, no place to live, no job, *nothing*. The only thing I had was a huge debt to pay, which is what ultimately motivates you to stay and endure anything."

Moreover, as we will see throughout this thesis, the fact that most of my participants travelled as undocumented migrants had a profound impact not just on their emigration journey, but on their entire migration trajectory including their settlement, return and (re)integration into Mexico.

4.3. Motivations/pressures to migrate and expectations of life in the USA

As we learnt from Susana's excerpt, the well-known financial motivations/pressures to migrate were closely intertwined with life course aspects and contextual circumstances. In the urban case, the majority of participants mentioned that their main motivation to migrate was to join their relatives, either their parents, husbands, or for those migrating at an advanced age, their children. Participants often acknowledged that while their relatives had a financial motivation to migrate, they did not have the same financial constraint as they often enjoyed the benefits of the remittances received from the USA⁶², and their motivation was relational. Another common migration motivation in the urban site was the need to get away from the insecurity that prevails in Mexico. Elba (MC, 23) explains it this way, "In this

⁶² Smith (2005) uses the term 'remittance bourgeoisie' to describe those who live more comfortably due to the flow of dollars from the USA.

country [Mexico] it doesn't matter if you are poor or rich, we are all exposed to the same risks, we are all potential victims of crime, therefore we all need to find a way to get out of here."

In the rural site, the majority of interviewees stated that their main motivation to migrate was the need to accumulate financial capital. Males in particular often described that it was once they got married or had their first child that they decided to migrate. Participants were very much aware of their gendered life course responsibilities as breadwinners, therefore they needed to earn a higher income to support their family, save money to invest in a business or, in many cases, be able to build a house (or improve the one they had) for their loved ones. We can conclude that, while the financial need had always been present, what finally triggered the emigration movement of participants from the rural site were these cultural and social determining factors. In the words of Massey (1987), "the precise timing of migration is associated with life-cycle changes that affect the level of dependency within the household, suggesting that migration is employed in a conscious, strategic way by families during times of pressing need."

Other migration motivations mentioned in both sites were the hope of *salir adelante* (getting ahead), the adventure of going *al otro lado* (to the other side of the border), and for some, such as Susana, the need to distance themselves from a problematic situation such as family conflicts. However, as we learnt from Susana's opening quote, the majority of participants had multiple motivations to migrate. As another example, Angeles (MC, 62) elaborates on her challenging pressures to migrate as a single mother:

I was a single mother of five young children. At that time, I just had two of them with me because the other three were with their father. He took them away from me. My sister, living there [USA], encouraged me to join her, she said there I would be able to find a job and she would help me to take care of them [children]. I really liked the idea, that way he [ex-spouse] would not be able to take my children away again [...] In that year [1995] people broke into my house, they did not have much to take with them but they could have harmed us. I was too afraid, afraid of him [ex-spouse] and afraid of thieves, so I left.

Regarding the participants' expectations of their time in the USA, they often mentioned that during their stay in the USA they expected to be able to enhance their individual and family's material wellbeing. For those who migrated as adults, their expectations were diverse but often linked to their motivations to migrate. Statements such as 'being able to find a well-paid job' and being able to *salir adelante* were common among participants. Expectations of financial development are often fed by the experiences of other migrants,

particularly in smaller and rural communities. In the words of Luis (H, 35), “I saw how people who were in the USA used to send money to start businesses and build their homes, I wanted [to do] the same.” Researchers have documented how migrants’ public displays of ‘financial success’ often raise (unrealistic) expectations in communities of origin, which in turn become a pull migration factor (Jiménez and Fitzgerald 2007:351; Massey 1987:1399). In the words of Susana (MC, 35): “Everyone talks about the nice parts, mainly the money, but no one talks about the difficult parts. I never imagined that I was leaving my chance to have a university degree to become a cleaner. You do not know the kind of jobs we need to do to get money, no one fully understands what it is like until you get there.”

When I asked if those initial expectations changed upon arrival, the answer from almost all participants was affirmative. One third of participants expressed feeling disappointment, but a similar number of interviewees had the opposite experience; they were pleasantly surprised with what they found upon their arrival. The majority of those who reported a negative experience came from Huaquechula and the main problems described were related to their employment (either being unable to get a job, having to work very long hours, or receiving a low salary); not being able to adjust to the new environment, to their undocumented, and/or lower social status; or not being able to cope with being away from their loved ones. Those who were pleasantly surprised with what they found often narrated with excitement and a certain nostalgia their first impressions of the place where they arrived to (e.g. the experience of walking in the streets of Manhattan for the first time, the surprise of finding themselves in a place with so much ethnic diversity, or the beauty of seeing snow for the first time).

Moreover, almost half of the participants mentioned that their (mainly material) expectations grew upon their arrival. Adrian (H, 44) described in a simple way what many participants shared, “after being there [the USA] for a while and realising the money I could earn, my expectations and ambition grew.” Young migrants from the 1.5 generation who attended public school experienced an inclusion atypical for the lives of undocumented migrants in the USA, which often led to the development of aspirations for better opportunities than those of their parents, and similar to those of the mainstream American society (Bean et al. 1987; Chavez 1991, 2012). Gonzales (2011) calls this stage of childhood and early adolescence a state of ‘suspended illegality’ which is characterised by the lack of realisation of the full future implications (limitations) of their undocumented status.

When discussing return expectations upon arrival, interviewees often mentioned that their initial plan was to stay in the USA for a short period of time. Therefore, those who wanted to settle down permanently upon arrival were very few. Those participants who travelled as children and had little, or no, say in the decision-making process often mentioned that they had no expectations and/or expected to go back to Mexico as soon as possible. As we will see in the following section, a considerable number of participants extended their initial stay far longer than they anticipated.

4.4. Life in the USA

The analysis of my participants' life experiences in the USA includes significant factors that had shaped and influenced their integration process into the host country, and most importantly, that may have also influenced their (re)integration experience in Mexico. This analysis includes a discussion regarding key aspects for their integration process, such as length of time spent in the USA, and their place of settlement, as well as an analysis of the various dimensions of integration. Finally, following the '(re)integration framework' we will learn of my interviewees' assessments of their entire experience in the USA and how this impacted on their wellbeing and future aspirations at that time.

4.4.1. For how long, and where, did migrants live while in the USA?

In terms of the number of years spent in the USA, participants interviewed in Mexico City had spent longer periods of time in comparison with those from Huaquechula, with an average of 15 years versus 11, a minimum stay of three years and a maximum of 29 years. These long stays contrast with the initial expectations previously mentioned. Participants often mentioned how, without having made a conscious decision, they found themselves having built a life in the USA, which included raising a family, studying, creating a business or being promoted in their jobs; or assuming responsibilities back in Mexico that required their financial support. As a consequence of these circumstances, participants either postponed the 'desired' return or decided to find a way to remain in the USA permanently. Furthermore, those who were 'doing good' were not the only ones eager to extend their stay in the USA, it was also the hope of those who were struggling. For instance, Angeles (MC, 62) said,

Well I did not have strong reasons to stay in the USA, I was actually struggling to feed my children while earning the minimum wage, but I thought 'if I have to choose between being poor in the USA or in Mexico, better being poor in there.' At least over

there [USA] you have safety... over there even if you earn the minimum wage you can afford life and even have a car. What you get here [Mexico] making the minimum wage is not even enough to survive.

While the majority of participants spent longer than expected in their host country, more than half of them interrupted their stay. This means that they travelled to Mexico at least once during those years living in the USA. Participants had different kinds of returns, some of them were 'temporary' and despite others being considered as 'permanent', participants often needed to re-migrate and extended (once again) their stay in the USA. These returns and re-migration movements will be furthered discussed in Chapter 5.

Following their arrival in the USA, most of the participants remained in the same place in which they initially arrived. A very small group of participants moved to another location after a certain amount of time spent in their location of arrival and most of them had immigration documents. The vast majority of participants from Huaquechula settled in New York City, specifically in the neighbourhoods of Queens and Brooklyn; the others mentioned settling in the neighbouring state of New Jersey, and in Florida. As for people from Mexico City, there was a wider diversity of states where people settled, the most common state being California, followed by Texas, Arizona, Illinois and North Carolina.

From their study on Mexican migrants' settlement patterns, Massey and his colleagues concluded that migration streams from a specific place of origin to a specific place of destination reflect the inherent tendency of earlier migrants to assist the more recent ones by providing money to pay for the trip (smuggler and transportation costs) and temporary housing, and by helping the newcomer to find employment (1993:448). The findings of this research demonstrate the same dynamic whereby, for example, almost all of the participants lived with the person who 'sponsored' their trips to the USA upon their arrival in the country. In a second phase, depending on their finances and the networks that they had established, some participants moved to live with friends, their new spouses, or for a small number of participants, on their own. While the majority paid rent and shared their accommodation with other migrants (who in many cases were not related to them), others made an effort to acquire somewhere to live of their own. As buying a house was not affordable for many, some migrants decided to buy *trailas* (mobile homes) and settled in trailer parks. People in a better financial position managed to buy land and park their homes there.

Another important finding related to settlement patterns that is relevant to this research is the dramatic shift in Mexican migration destinations in the USA during the 1990s (Massey

and Capoferro 2008:26). There was a decrease in the number of migrants arriving in traditional states of settlement such as California, New York and Texas and an increase in the number of migrants in states such as Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Georgia among others. Through my participants' narrations, I was able to corroborate this finding and learn more about the experiences of people who lived in non-traditional states of settlement. In the following excerpt from his interview, Charly (MC, 22) described his impressions of his first day at school following his arrival in North Carolina in 2002:

It was like the films: the hallways with the lockers, you see the white people, the black people... just like, walking in the hallway, normal... I think I was the only Hispanic there, no, me and my interpreter⁶³ were the only Hispanics there... Later on, six other [children] arrived and got into the same ESL⁶⁴ class. We were the new ones, I can say we were the only Hispanics there, we were seven or eight in the entire school.

In this excerpt of his interview, Charly describes not just the fact that North Carolina, at that time, had a small 'Latino' population, he also highlights that the numbers of 'Latinos' increased rapidly. Later in his narration, he calculated that two years after his arrival the percentage of 'Latinos' in the school had increased to five percent, and just before returning to Mexico the percentage could have increased to forty percent. Later in this chapter we will analyse how factors such as length of stay in the USA and place of settlement influenced migrants' integration processes in the USA, as well as their overall migration experiences.

4.4.2. Structural dimension

The structural dimension incorporates migrants' participation in local institutions such as education and the labour market. At the same time, migrants' access to and active participation in governmental institutions, more often than not, required documented immigration status. As aforementioned, the vast majority of my research participants travelled to the USA without documents and remained undocumented during their stay in the USA. While their undocumented status defined not only functional aspects (e.g. entry into the USA, access to the job market and services), and more personal ones (e.g. the way their families were structured and developed, their life and professional aspirations, their identities), it certainly did not prevent them from having 'functional lives' in the USA.

⁶³ Later in his interview, Charly described that in that school every new student who did not speak English was assigned an interpreter to help them with the language and other practical issues during the adjustment time.

⁶⁴ English as Second Language (ESL).

While opportunities to gain documented status in the USA were extremely limited for them, participants showed varying levels of interest and made different steps towards obtaining it. As an example, during the three years that she lived in the USA, Lucy (H, 47) did not have documents other than her Mexican voting card and passport which were sufficient to access work, and move around safely. In answer to my question of why she did not look for the possibility to obtain other documents, she replied that it was because she did not require anything more to have, as she called, “a simple life in the USA.” Moreover, as Lucy’s plan (similarly to several other participants) was to return to Huaquechula as soon as she earned enough money to build her house, she had no interest in obtaining any further documentation.

Conversely, Claudia (MC, 43) lived a much busier and settled life in the USA. During the 12 years that she lived there, she managed to learn the language, open bank accounts, set up a business, buy assets such as a house and cars, be an active Church member, and access various services⁶⁵. In order to build this life, she just needed a false social security card and a driving licence. Her hopes for immigration reform in the USA were like those of many others, as Nadia (MC, 35) described, “one buys the discourse that if you are the model immigrant, if you behave well and you are ‘a success story’, you will be OK... you convince yourself that it [deportation] will not happen to me... the immigration reform will come one day for all of us.” Some participants even decided to declare their income and pay taxes regularly, volunteer or become members of local community services so that when the ‘time came’ (for immigration reform), they would have a better chance of obtaining a ‘green card’ (permanent residency) based on their contributions made as exemplary community members. While some other participants considered that the only possible way to obtain permanent residency was through marriage, just one regularised her status this way. Some interviewees, such as Natalia (MC, 28) and Elba (MC, 23), received marriage proposals from friends to help them get their documentation but they decided to turn these offers down. A few participants who had residency documentation (green card) and had the opportunity to pursue naturalisation did not opt for it. For example, Ricardo (MC, 36) had his residency for approximately 16 years and when asked the reasons for not obtaining his citizenship he said: “I never thought things could get so complicated, I never did my [citizenship] test and

⁶⁵ She accessed local health services where she gave birth to four children. Later, she benefited from her children’s access to food subsidy, education services and one of them received financial support from the government due to an intellectual disability.

that is why I am here... it was a disgrace. You wanna know why I didn't want to do it [citizenship test]?, because it was a matter of pride. I always thought, 'I am Mexican, I am not American, I do not want to be American'. I was stupid."

Approximately 10 percent of my research participants decided to take a step forward and managed to start a process to regularise their status and obtain temporary documentation. Unfortunately, all their cases were rejected by the immigration authorities. Julieta (H, 47) openly regrets trying to get her documents, as she said, "the plan backfired while trying to do the right thing... if I had never started the process we might even still be there, with no papers, but off their [Homeland security] radar and living our lives." From this section, we can conclude that while a few participants had the opportunity to fully integrate through obtaining their immigration documents in the USA, or were not interested in this option, for the vast majority regularising their status was simply not a possibility. As van Houte and Davids have accurately observed, the fact that my participants did not have a plausible (documented) manner in which to stay in their host/new 'home' country became a crucial structural barrier for their integration processes in the USA, and eventually forced them to return to Mexico thereby having further implications for their (re)integration experiences (2008:1413).

In relation to public services, while living in the USA interviewees accessed services provided by the 'host' government, primarily health services (Medicaid) and K-12 education⁶⁶; as well as those provided by the Mexican government, primarily consular services in order to obtain identification documents such as *matrícula consular*⁶⁷, passports, birth or marriage certificates. While there is evidence that many undocumented migrants live with unmet health care needs in the USA (Derose et al. 2007), more than half of my participants had access to medical care, of which a majority were female. In the case of the female participants, health services were primarily accessed for childbirth. A few other participants accessed services due to work accidents or other emergencies. While none of the interviewees reported being prevented from receiving emergency medical assistance, common reasons for not attempting to access services were: language barriers, lack of information regarding available services, lack of financial resources, fear of deportation and lack of time to address their health care needs.

⁶⁶ K-12 is a term used in education in the United States, to refer to the publicly-supported school grades prior to university. These grades are kindergarten (K) up to 12th grade (12).

⁶⁷ Consular identification card is an official identity card issued by the Mexican government to their citizens who are living in the USA, which is particularly helpful for undocumented migrants.

According to the law in the USA, all individuals — including those who are undocumented — have the right to a free and equal K-12 public education (see Supreme Court's *Plyler v. Doe* 1982). Therefore, all interviewees who arrived in the USA as children (1.5 generation) reported being able to enrol and attend school without major difficulty. During their interviews, participants described how their incorporation into school shaped their integration process in the USA and their future aspirations. Their ability to learn the language was key to their integration process and schools played a crucial role in this regard. Elba (MC, 23) explained that she needed to learn English, not only to be able to survive and progress at school, but also to be able to support her parents to communicate, to take care of the household administrative tasks (e.g. pay bills and go shopping) and help her younger sister with school duties. Moreover, access to the education system in the USA made her realise her potential as a student, and shaped her cultural orientation and life aspirations.

Passing the ELDA⁶⁸ test two years after arrival was key to my life, it meant not only that I was officially a fluent English speaker, it also helped me to realise what I was capable of, I realised that I had a future...After that, I was incorporated into the 'Gifted and Talented' programme, that is when this 'race' started [...] When I realised that I had been able to pass that test and was at the same level as anybody else, then is when I said, 'I will go to college' [...] I was going to get everything anybody else could get, I got into the 'American Dream' mentality... 'you work hard, you get what you want!', I was so naïve...

Unfortunately, the right to free and equal access to education ends when migrants complete secondary school. As participants grew older, they became more aware of the limitations that they faced due to their undocumented status. Therefore, the majority left formal education without trying to attend university or were unable to continue with their university education⁶⁹. The full realisation of their 'illegality' (Gonzales 2011) represented a watershed moment in participants' lives and for their futures. For more than one participant, this realisation was so paramount that it had a strong impact on their (material, psychosocial and relational) wellbeing and destabilised their sense of self. In the words of Luis (MC, 32):

Every time I had to talk about my future [applying for college], my undocumented status was 'the elephant in the room'. I was afraid to openly disclose my [undocumented] status, it made me feel ashamed so I was constantly avoiding the topic or lying about it. Currently I am not struggling with it any more [...] but at that time, and at that age, it was different. I had a lot of peer pressure, we [circle of friends] were very competitive so everyone wanted to know what colleges I had applied for

⁶⁸ English Language Development Assessment.

⁶⁹ Overall, the Mexican-born population in the United States has a higher rate of school dropout than any other national or ethnic group (Cortina 2003:12).

and follow the entire process step by step. At a point I guess they realised what was going on. I felt so sad and ashamed...those are some of my worse memories of back then. I wish I had handled it differently, with more honesty.

Some participants were able to identify barriers to continuing with their higher education, such as a lack of immigration status, restrictive local regulations to access community college, language barriers, lack of support from their next of kin and lack of financial resources. Despite the obstacles faced, some interviewees, such as Luis (MC, 32) and Nadia (MC, 35), decided to look for ways to move forward. Being a first-generation university student brought other challenges at the household level, and participants often felt little supported by their parents. Therefore, teachers and peers became vital in providing vocational advice, as well as information and support, to enable participants to 'navigate' the system successfully. Due to their efforts, Luis managed to access community college and Nadia a private catholic university where she was exempted from paying fees. For other participants, such as Tony (H, 37) and Ricardo (MC, 36), circumstances and (lack of) family support shaped their decisions in a different way: both decided to drop out of school and joined a gang. For all participants, the (gendered) decisions that they took at that point in their lives had a crucial impact on their later return to Mexico.

As was the case for Nadia, other participants had access to non-governmental support in times of need. Some examples mentioned were civil organisations providing legal advice; churches or private institutions where participants could receive in-kind donations, such as food and clothes, or medical care; and migrants' support groups where they could get information about how to access higher education.

Access to the job market was also identified as crucial for participants' integration into American society, and the majority worked in the service and construction sectors. "In any given restaurant in Manhattan] you will always find at least one Mexican, either working in the kitchen or serving food. Many of those are *paisanos* (conationals)" said Paco (H, 37) who worked in Manhattan for several years in various restaurants as a kitchen porter. Like Paco, many other participants from Huaquechula worked in services, construction and factories; jobs for men were mainly in construction, restaurants and gardening, for women the main jobs were in childcare and housekeeping and in factories doing manual labour. Fewer participants managed to establish their own businesses or become students like Luis and Nadia; and a minority (women) stayed at home as housewives, worked in a professional

job, or like Ricardo and Tony, decided to join a gang and undertake illegal activities such as drugs and arms dealing.

When talking about wellbeing, I could identify two broad narratives: those who were satisfied and had a sense of pride in their achievements, and those who felt that their job experience in the USA was a setback in their lives. For the case of women, migration and access to employment contributed to improving their capacity for personal autonomy. Rebeca (H, 33) is an example of those who were satisfied; in her interview she described in great detail and with a profound sense of pride how she was able to move up the ladder at her work place, going from cleaner to manager within one year. Despite her experience of exploitation (e.g. working long hours and receiving low pay without benefits), her work experience in the USA presented a great opportunity for personal and professional development. She highlighted that, contrary to what happens in Mexico, in the USA her professional development depended solely on her work and not on her qualifications or personal connections. Conversely, Esther (H, 37) felt extremely disappointed that she was not able to practice as a nurse while in the USA; instead she had to work in a factory for most her time there. While the income received was useful for her material wellbeing, as we will see later in this thesis, Esther considered her life in the USA as a step back in her professional career that she regretted upon return.

Generally, participants agreed that they felt satisfaction as a result of being able to access a 'better life'. When unpacking what a 'better life' meant to participants, I realised that for them it signified the possibility of having enhanced purchasing power. While participants often complained about being away from their loved ones, feeling tired and stressed due to the long working hours, and high levels of responsibility, they really enjoyed the experience of being able to pay for their children's education, buy land or build a house back 'home', as well as the small pleasures of buying new clothes, going out to a 'fancy' restaurant or to the casino.

From this brief analysis of the structural dimension of integration, we can conclude that while the lack of immigration documents and work permits did not prevent my participants, to a certain extent, from living, a 'functional' life, it did limit their active, equal and full participation in the American society. In other words, those participants who wanted to improve their living conditions and enjoy the 'American dream' (e.g. gain access to a better job, health services or go to college), encountered barriers which prevented them from doing so.

4.4.3. Civic and political participation dimension

A quarter of my interviewees became involved in various civic and political activities. The majority got involved in issues related to their situation as (undocumented) migrants. For example, Carlos (MC, 35), Elba (MC, 23) and Nadia (MC, 35) were active in their respective locations during the rise of the 'Dreamers' Movement'. This activism included raising awareness of undocumented students' right to education and campaigning for an immigration reform. In the same spirit, some others participated in activities such as the historic May Day demonstrations of 2006 and 2007, which sparked in response the proposed legislation known as H.R. 4437,⁷⁰ and advocated for a comprehensive reform of the country's immigration laws that included a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants.

A minority of participants became involved in aspects related to local politics, either in the USA or Mexico. For example, Arturo (MC, 36) and Ricardo (MC, 36), who held their 'green card' (residency) at that time, got involved in local politics by supporting political figures during elections and promoting the vote among the 'Latino' community. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, some participants, such as Damian (MC, 23) and Joel (H, 62), decided to get involved in their local community as volunteers thinking that if there was immigration reform in the future, this could have a positive impact on their case to regularise their status. Lastly, Hugo (H, 47) was the only participant who was involved in local politics in Mexico. Due to his close connection to the community, he was assigned various religious responsibilities (*cargos*) which paved his way to gain the role in the local government that he has today.

Among the reasons for not participating in any civic or political activities, interviewees mentioned not having time, lack of interest, or that they were disillusioned with politics, particularly in Mexico. Andres (H, 39) explained it to me in this way,

Involvement in politics? Me? Never! Why would I waste my time? Let me put it this way, I have many responsibilities, I do care for my people you know? My family, my mother, my town. They [politicians] do not care about me, and even less about my family. Over here [Mexico] they want us there, over there [USA] they say they want us here, but the reality is that they need us. They need us to sustain what they have built, they need their hard-working, badly-paid Mexicans. They are ungrateful, they use us, they squeeze the best from us (hard work and money), and then they forget about us. No, I would never get involved in politics.

⁷⁰ The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005.

4.4.4. Social dimension: social bonds and bridges

The social dimension concerns how migrants maintain and develop social bonds and bridges, for example relationships with family members, or with non-migrant groups. The majority of participants reported that the most meaningful bonds they had while in the USA were often limited to their household members, composed of their nuclear families, close relatives and/or friends. While often family members were key to achieving their goal of reaching the USA and were extremely supportive during the settlement phase, participants often mentioned experiencing rivalries and facing conflicts soon after their arrival. It is worth highlighting that even though I heard complaints of this nature in both sites, there was a stronger affiliation to family and community amongst migrants originally from the rural site than from the urban site. As an example, Patricia (MC, 38) complained that soon after her arrival and initial settlement, her relatives withdrew their support. She said that often she felt that, through their actions, they were telling her "if I struggled, you have to struggle too", and "the fact that you are 'getting ahead', represents a threat to me." Consequently, participants sought to establish bonds with other 'Latinos' outside the household or close groups that participants considered to be more supportive than their fellow conationals. As often 'Latino' migrants shared similar experiences due to their undocumented status, they would be empathetic with the newcomers, thereby replacing the support lacking from close household members.

In some other cases (mainly for those who had a good command of English), people also established good relations (bridges) with members of other ethnic groups such as African-Americans or Asians. For example, Nadia (MC, 35) migrated when she was nine years old and lived in a neighbourhood in Los Angeles with a large African-American population; she therefore developed strong friendships outside of the 'Latino' community. Particularly in the case of the 1.5 generation, school was a place where they socialised. While some of them, like Charly (MC, 22), decided to "stick to my [their] own people", some others, like Nadia (MC, 35), "...felt I [she] had to be separated from my [her] own people so I [she] could *salir adelante* (get ahead)". Alternatively, there were cases such as that of Elba (MC, 23) who went through a phase of "wannabe gringa", when she thought that by neglecting her Mexican identity she would be able to 'merge' with the mainstream 'white' group. As we learnt from Luis' (MC, 32) experience, for many participants their undocumented status represented an additional obstacle while establishing new relationships. Experiencing feelings of shame, worry and/or fear impacted their everyday lives and shaped the way and with whom they

were able to relate. Undocumented status often became an 'illegal' identity (Gonzales 2011), impossible to disclose to everyone. Regarding this issue, Damian (MC, 23) said: "Yeah, I had some girlfriends but I never told them about my [undocumented] immigration status, only one knew about it. Actually, very few people knew, this girlfriend, my best friend, and another friend from high school. They were very few, you could count them with one hand."

As Damian highlights, romantic relationships were also a key aspect of interviewees' lives. As the majority of participants migrated at a young age, almost half of the sample established intimate partner relationships during their time in the USA. Despite their exposure to a great diversity of ethnicities while in the USA, almost all participants chose a Mexican partner either living in the USA or back in Mexico. Some reasons for that were described by Ricardo (MC, 36), "I liked being among people with my same culture, I wanted my children to be raised with Mexican roots." One of the differences between sites is that those interviewed in Mexico City established more relationships with people who were not originally from their locality. As an example, we have Juan (MC, 53) who married someone from Zacatecas, and Diego (MC, 38) who established two relationships with Mexican-Americans.

Conversely, migrants from Huaquechula commonly engaged in relationships with people originally from *el pueblo* (their town) who were living in the USA, but also with people living back 'home'. These relationships were established either while on a break in Mexico or in a long-distance fashion. Interestingly, all the participants who established relationships with people at 'home' were men. While there might be several interpretations of this, perhaps the most obvious reason could be that generally men were more likely to cross the border multiple times without documentation, therefore they had more contact with people back 'home'. Two other reasons mentioned by my participants were that male migrants were very popular amongst women back in the community as they were considered to be a 'good catch'. Another explanation is that men preferred women from *el pueblo* as they were typically more conservative than women living in the USA and less 'empowered'. In the words of Rebeca (H, 33) "women from back 'home' are considered as 'better'. You know, they stay at home, do the chores, have children and do everything that the husband wants, while they [men] also do what they want over there [the USA]. They are more manageable." Lastly, some participants established relationships with non-Mexicans, the majority being Latin-American, and in a minority of cases with other nationalities such as Filipino, Chinese and Russian.

Interviewees described how their ability to relate to others was limited by their lack of time and language skills. Therefore, in addition to schools, interactions with others took place in work places and locations within their neighbourhoods, such as church or the local laundrette. Locations for socialising and networking would also vary depending on the locality. Interviewees living in 'new states' of migration, like Charly (MC, 22), often reported that their lives were more focused on their families and on work colleagues who were often not part of the 'Latino' community. Consequently, people living in areas with high numbers of migrants, such as New York or Los Angeles, would more often develop relationships with members of the 'Latino' community.

Some participants were more active than others in maintaining their networks in Mexico. Particularly those who left their families behind, and were the main breadwinners of their household, had frequent communication with their networks in Mexico and sent remittances. Conversely, those who migrated at a very young age, were unmarried or did not have children, did not have such a strong attachment to 'home' and their communication with networks in Mexico was considerably less frequent. Those participants who had an ongoing 'project' back home, either building a house or establishing a business, mentioned being in constant communication with networks in Mexico to monitor their projects' progress.

As communication became easier and more affordable with time, the migration patterns between Mexico and the USA were also modified. For the specific case of Huaquechula, migrants who left in the early years mentioned having problems communicating due to lack of telephones in their communities; in order to talk to them their relatives had to travel approximately 30 kilometres to reach the closest phone. This situation encouraged more return visits to *el pueblo* in comparison with the urban site. In general, people mentioned being in communication either with close relatives but very few were in touch with friends or members of the wider community. As mentioned earlier, limited time left little room for socialising.

As Elba's and Luis' testimonies have shown us, the strength and transformation of participants' (local and/or transnational) social networks affected their local integration. This, in conjunction with the other multiple changes experienced, often led to participants' need to question their identity and sense of belonging. In more than one case their social interactions in the new environment led to their need to negotiate and adjust to their new realities, and learn how to become, in the words of my interviewees, "less Mexican and more

American”, “an exemplary migrant”, “a modern woman”, “good father” or “an ‘illegal’ migrant.”

4.4.5. Cultural dimension: cultural identification and cultural orientation

As discussed in Chapter 2, the analysis of this dimension includes two main aspects, cultural identification and orientation. The former will be used to discuss participants’ sense of belonging or ascription to a cultural group (Heckman 2001), the latter to refer to migrants’ alignment with the cultural values and practices of the ‘home’ or host country (Berry 1980). In this research, the relevance of the analysis of this domain is rooted in the argument that culture is an important determinant of, in this case, migrants’ attitudes and behaviours (Berry 2005:704).

In answer to the question, ‘at that time [while in the USA] what community and culture did you identify with?’ more than half of the participants bluntly replied, “with the Mexican”. Some others would go further and identify themselves as *Chilangos*⁷¹ or *Poblanos* (person who is originally from Puebla), or as from their local communities, for example *Huaquechulenes*. People who identified themselves with their communities of origin would often highlight the importance of their culture and traditions in their lives. Adrian (H, 44), who lived in the USA for approximately 12 years, stated: “I have always valued my roots, my culture and traditions. I was one of those people who with a couple of drinks would yearn for *mi pueblo* [my town], for my people, for a handmade *tortilla* [Mexican maize bread] and a *molito* [traditional dish]. Don’t get me wrong, I did like my life there [USA] but I always felt that this is the place I belong to, the place I love.”

When comparing the two locations, I can say that there was definitely a stronger sense of identification and orientation towards their local communities in those originally from the rural site. The first possible explanation for this is related to their life course, participants originally from Mexico City migrated at a younger age, therefore their cultural identification was not as strong as that of those who migrated at a later stage in life, like the ones from Huaquechula. Additionally, as discussed earlier in this chapter, during their time in the USA members of the 1.5 generation had more opportunity to build social networks and identify themselves with a wider non-Mexican community. The second aspect is that as Mexico City is a megalopolis, it is a less cohesive environment and the traditions are as diverse as the

⁷¹ While *Chilangos* are considered to be migrants living in Mexico City who are not originally from there, it has become a term also used as a way to refer to people born in Mexico City.

people who inhabit it; therefore Mexico City residents may have a weaker cultural orientation than people from smaller communities. Furthermore, another aspect influencing participants' self-identification was internal north-south rivalries between Mexicans⁷². Charly (MC, 22), who is originally from Mexico City, shared an interesting experience regarding how at one point in his life in the USA he decided to self-identify as originally from Sinaloa (a northern state) in order to be more popular within the Mexican community:

[...] when you are a kid you do not even see that [differences between Mexican migrants], it was not until high school when I started seeing the differences between people coming from different states. I realised that people had contrasting opinions about people from 'here' or 'there'. Once I was talking to a girl, she asked me where I was from. I said Mexico City, later in the conversation I shared that my grandfather was originally from Sinaloa and she told me 'just say that you are from Sinaloa, it's much better if you say you are from Sinaloa than from Mexico City.' So I did, and it made a big difference! We would go to the club and when I told people that I was from Sinaloa they would make that 'oh my God! face'. In the States if you say that you are from Mexico City they see you like 'low' [status]... Actually people who are considered as 'low' [status] are from Mexico City, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Chiapas...those are the low standards. The 'high' standards are Sinaloa, Michoacán, like the northern states, those are the ones which, you know, that have a 'higher' level. I must say that when I met people from Mexico City I did not like them, I felt they were like arrogant, I did not like their accent.

Other participants, such as Charly, decided to self-identify with groups other than their local communities. Almost one-third of the sample self-identified as 'Hispano' or 'Latino' as they found good friends and cultural affinities (e.g. speaking the same language, food and religious similarities, being an undocumented migrant) within a larger local community of migrants. A smaller, but equally significant, group identified themselves with the 'mainstream' Anglo-American culture. Another element that influenced this identification with the non-Mexican community was rivalries between conationals. People often felt that they could not identify with a group of people that they did not feel supported or respected by. In the words of Diego (MC, 38), "I identified with *Anglos*, as they like doing things correctly and share a strong solidarity. Mexicans were not like that, there was no support amongst us, all the problems I had at work were because of envies and conflicts with other Mexicans."

Overall, I can say that this exercise of defining their cultural identification and therefore orientation, was challenging for many of my interviewees. As we will learn from Luis' quote below, cultural identities would often vary depending on the setting and audience, among

⁷² There is a popular belief that residents from northern states often have attitudes of disdain and rivalry towards residents of Mexico City and other (southern) states.

other variables,

Identity or culture has a static part defined by the documents you hold, in that sense I was Mexican. But identity goes beyond that, and it is far from static. If you had asked me 10 years ago I would reply to that question in three different ways, one 'I am from North Carolina'; second 'I am Mexican from the USA'; and third, if I were among Mexicans I would say, 'I am from Tampico' [capital of the northern state of Tamaulipas where he was born]. The answer would depend on the context, the person I was talking to... even the language I was speaking.

Javier (H, 42) explained the way in which the passing of time influenced his cultural identification and orientation. Through his experience of marrying a migrant woman from outside the Latino community, Javier was exposed to a wider migrant community and cultural experiences. His relationship, over time, shaped his self-identification. "I would say in the beginning I identified more with the group from Bonilla [home community]. As time passed by, I used to say "I am Mexican or Hispanic." Maybe it was because no one knew where Bonilla was but also as time passed by I felt more detached from my community and more, let's say, "citizen of the world." As Luis and Javier reflect, after living in the USA for a while, people had more difficulty defining their cultural identity as something local and fixed. Their identity and orientation evolved with time and expanded as they interacted with wider society.

4.5. Human wellbeing while in the USA

I had a proper life there [USA], I managed to access university, I had my friends, my family, a job, my house, my car. Everything was the same as an American. It was like 'the dream come true' life, but at the end of the day I knew that no matter how hard I tried, as long as I was undocumented, it would be impossible to have a 'real' job. I felt I was a second-class citizen, a fake one.

As stated in Chapter 2 while introducing the '(re)integration framework', in order to better understand research participants' (re)integration experiences, this analysis incorporates their own evaluation of their overall integration processes. This analysis will help us to later examine their (re)integration processes and how these perceptions influence their wellbeing and future life aspirations.

Almost two-thirds of the interviewees considered that they managed to integrate into American society. As in Natalia's (MC, 28) experience, many of my participants stated that for them the term 'integrated' meant having built a functional life in the USA where they had material (access to its local institutions, e.g. schools, jobs, churches) and relational wellbeing

(developed meaningful relationships, e.g. friendships in some cases, even a family). Furthermore, some participants were able to learn the language, and develop a strong cultural identification with the American society. While the majority of participants had limited contact with the wider society and the 'official' language, their psychosocial wellbeing was influenced positively because of feeling part of a (migrant) community. Due to this, many described feeling happy and satisfied. For those who did not share the same psychosocial wellbeing, the main obstacles found were not being able to speak the language, not having access to immigration documents, and/or not being interested in building their lives in the USA.

Positive results? Hmmm they were many, the main one I guess was realising that I was able to get on my feet over and over again [resilience]. Yes, I struggled but I realised that I am capable and smart... *chingona*⁷³. Now I know that I can raise a child [sister], that I am good at school, that I can be better than the *gringos* [...] that people are people, that my parents are not perfect... I had the chance to know my parents in a better way, we became close to the point that my father could finally express his feelings towards me.

Like Elba (MC, 23), some of the positive consequences of having lived in the USA identified by my interviewees were related to their psychosocial (having experienced personal development - 40), material (having the opportunity to acquire assets - 25), as well as relational wellbeing (establishing and/or supporting their own families - 19). Some of the factors that participants identified as personal development were learning to work hard; developing skills and networks; acquiring new civic values; travelling and gaining a new life experience; being able to learn a new language and accessing new cultures. However, as Elba highlights, participants (specially women) typically mentioned that they developed a sense of empowerment, emancipation, and resilience.

Interviewees reported that their greatest regret from their time in the USA is having been away from their families for so long. Some regretted having been in trouble with the law for consuming or selling drugs, joining a gang, or developing an addiction to alcohol. Interviewees also regret not having the opportunity to regularise their immigration status and then being involved in traffic accidents or unexpected situations that, in one way or another, put an end to their lives in the USA. Many others regret being unable to save, send or invest more financial capital in their communities of origin, having experienced episodes of

⁷³ Chingona is the feminine of chingon which is a Mexican colloquial way of saying that someone is very smart, intelligent and can do things quickly.

discrimination, as well as having left their professional careers in Mexico to occupy low-end jobs in the USA.

Any human experience is embedded with multiple emotions, and the migration experience is no exception. Within one single interview, one could identify a diverse range of emotions, and very often, contrasting ones. Some examples of recurrent emotional dichotomies were: disillusionment as a result of unmet expectations but excitement about new discoveries; nostalgia or sadness due to not being able to be with their families and in their communities but happiness to be financially independent and have a new sense of autonomy; anger when being discriminated against by their employers and gratefulness for having employment; shame for not being able to send remittances back 'home' as expected and the 'forbidden pleasure' of purchasing something for themselves instead; frustration and resentment due to a lack of opportunity to regularise their immigration status and live the 'American Dream' but gratitude for the life experience. By way of this description of the emotional complexities of the participants, my aim is to illustrate that just as the integration process is challenging, so too are the emotional journeys of those who experience it. As we will see in the following chapters, participants' wellbeing during the (re)integration process was significantly influenced by their perceptions of the pre-return and return stages. As an example Diego (MC, 38), who joined a gang at a very young age, considered his life in the USA as a negative experience, "Overall I feel the USA did me more wrong than good. I guess it all started as something exciting but at a point I completely lost the track of my life and it ended very badly. I used drugs, drank, stole. All the wrong I did, had negative consequences. I wasted my time and the opportunities I had."

4.6. Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on the returnees' experiences in the country of migration which is relevant to further understand how this will later shape and influence their return, and (re)integration experiences (this be discussed in Chapters 5 and 7). In this chapter, we explored my interviewees' profiles when they migrated to the USA for the first time, their motivations and/or pressures to migrate and their expectations of their lives in the USA, as well as their journeys and integration processes while in the USA.

In the first section of this chapter, we learnt that while people migrate at different moments of their life course, the majority of my interviewees left for the USA at a young age (either as children or young adults) while being unmarried or having recently started a family. Despite

the fact that the financial need or motivation had always been present due to the unfavourable socio-economic context in Mexico, we learnt that what finally encouraged people to migrate was often their gendered roles and life course circumstances, such as getting married or having a child. Additionally, the majority of my participants had basic levels of formal education and a low command of the English language. Immediately after arrival, while the most common plan was to stay in the USA for a short period of time, half of the participants remained in the USA for 10 or more years; much longer than expected. The integration experiences varied considerably from person to person: there were both participants who barely left home as they were devoted to their role as housewives, and those who were integrated into the mainstream society with the only obstacle being their lack of proper immigration documents, but feeling American in heart and mind. In terms of the structural dimension, we can conclude that while access to institutions was limited, it was not impossible and it opened the door for many to a wider American life experience. Through the analysis of the social dimension, we learnt that English language skills and age were significant personal aspects that influenced the ability of participants to develop social bridges outside the 'Latino' community. The older interviewees were at the time of their arrival, the less English they spoke and the more obstacles they faced when developing social bridges. Consequently, this dimension is closely linked to the cultural one, as the more exposed to diverse social circles that participants were, the higher their opportunities were to identify with American society.

As we learnt from Natalia's quote incorporated in the last section, despite the extent to which participants were able and willing to integrate into American society, this experience was often overshadowed by two aspects: their undocumented status and their need to be back at 'home' (relational wellbeing). In other words, for some the ability to develop 'normal and functional' lives did not align with the feeling of being 'rejected' and an 'alien' while in the USA or their lack of belonging.

5. The return experiences

I do not think there is a [return migrant] profile, the same diversity [of Mexican migrants] we see in the USA is the same diversity of migrants who are back [in Mexico]... a bit of everything, people like my parents [with no formal education], or like me and my brother that went to college; people who only speak Spanish and survived [in the USA] just with it, or people who speak an indigenous language and came back [from the USA] speaking more English than Spanish. The more I learn about returnees, the more I am surprised about the wide range of people [returning], there is not a single profile... What I am clear about is that among those who came by force [were deported], there are more men than women and that might be related to the fact that the [deportation] policies target mainly men. Sometimes I feel like a minority within this group [...] I am also surprised by the number of people who, quote-unquote, return voluntarily... I think I have met more people who have decided to come back than those who have been deported. I am always surprised by the kinds of people I meet!

I use Nadia's (MC, 35) quote to introduce this chapter because it highlights several important aspects of return migration, including the great diversity of Mexican migrants' profiles and return motivations. Her own experience as a young woman who graduated from university and was working for the local government of (what she called) her 'home' town at the time of her removal (as opposed to the 'typical' young man with low levels of education working in the construction sector), demonstrates this diversity. Additionally, Nadia both reflects on the volitional aspect of return, making the distinction between forced and 'voluntary' returns, and highlights the fact that the 'voluntary' nature of returns can be questionable.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the main objective of my research project is to generate a better understanding of return migrants' personal experiences of (re)integration and, by doing so, contribute to the existing theories and body of literature in this field. Therefore, in this second empirical chapter I review participants' return narrations through which I will explore their complex motivations/pressures and experiences of return. As mentioned in the last chapter, participants' financial motivations to emigrate were commonly intertwined with a need to reunite with family members, distance themselves from a problematic situation, or the excitement of going *al otro lado* (to the other side of the border). Similarly, various authors have highlighted that while the return of the first and 1.5 generation can be driven by economic factors, most of these returns are prompted by a combination of personal factors such as nostalgia, and gendered life course circumstances such as the need to look after elderly parents, the desire to raise their children within the familiar culture

of 'home'⁷⁴, and/or contextual factors such as being discriminated against or deported (Erdal and Ezzati 2015; King and Christou 2014; Tucker et al. 2013; van Hear 1998).

This chapter starts with an analysis of my informants' characteristics, the development of an overall understanding of Mexican migrants' motivations to return or stay in the USA, and a review of the differences between temporary and 'permanent' returns. Later in the chapter, I present four main narratives of return which reflect various degrees of agency in the decision-making process. Finally, I will briefly introduce key aspects of the decision-making process, preparations and journeys which will be followed by a discussion regarding geographies of return and returnees' expectations of their post-return lives. In this chapter, we will also explore the way in which negotiating return on the individual level is connected to the emigration and integration experiences in the USA, as well as to gendered life course, and contextual factors where normative understandings of individual agency take various forms, and sociocultural, generational and geographical dimensions exist (Erdal and Oeppen 2017:9; van Hear 1998:11).

5.1. Returnees' characteristics

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, there is a lack of accurate statistics that capture the sociodemographic profiles of Mexican migrants returning from the USA. Therefore, I requested support from my research participants to assist me to identify the most relevant characteristics of those who most commonly return. Regarding the gender distribution, there was a general consensus amongst participants that the majority of returnees are male. Moreover, participants agreed with Nadia's impression that men are more commonly removed from the USA than women.

This finding is corroborated by various authors who confirm that Mexican men tend to return in greater numbers than women. According to Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013), at least since the early 1990s, Latino and Caribbean men have been the targets of deportation policy. Between 1993 and 2011, the total number of deportations increased on average ninefold but when looking at ethnic groups Mexican deportations increased 10-fold and Central American 12-fold. EMIF data collected during 2010 reflected that fully 89 per cent of Mexicans who were repatriated from the USA were men. According to these authors, some of the causes of this gendered racial removal policy include the male joblessness

⁷⁴ Many of these reasons for return were presented by women due to the roles that they feel have been conferred upon them as wives and mothers.

since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the immigrant portrayed as a 'criminal alien' since the War on Terror, and the continued criminalisation of Black and Latino men by police authorities. Despite the fact that official estimates of numbers of returnees have increased by more than 200 percent from 2000 to 2010, the number of female returnees decreased by seven percent over the same period (Gandini et al. 2015:76; Masferrer and Roberts 2012; Massey et al. 2015; Ravuri 2014; Reyes 2001; Velasco and Coubes 2013; Waddell and Fontenla 2015).

In relation to age, two-thirds of my participants returned as adults between the ages of 25 and 42 (see Figure 7). This finding corresponds with the majority of my interviewees reporting that they emigrated at a young age and spent an average of 13 years in the USA. We can also see an anticipated difference in age at return between the sites: people returning to Huaquechula were more homogeneous in terms of age, with the majority returning between the ages of 31 to 42, while in the case of returnees in Mexico City, we can see a wider spectrum of age (see Figure 7). While the majority of participants returned between the ages of 19 and 36, there are those who returned at a young age (13 to 18) or as seniors (61+). Dustman and his colleagues concluded that return is more likely among those who emigrate when they are older (Dustman et al. 1996). While it is the case for some of my respondents, later in this chapter we will see how, in the Mexican case, aspects such as gendered life course and structural constraints on both sides of the border, are the main factors that trigger return.

Figure 7. Participants' age at the time of return

Age	H	MC
13 to 18	0	2
19 to 24	1	6
25 to 30	5	6
31 to 36	12	6
37 to 42	7	4
43 to 48	2	1
49 to 54	1	1
55 to 60	2	1
61+	0	3

Source: fieldwork with return migrants in Huaquechula and Mexico City.

For almost two-thirds of my participants, their marital status and family circumstances had changed upon return. The main change was that they went from being unmarried to having a relationship and, for some, a separation from their spouses. As for the third of my participants who did not change their marital status, the majority had left Mexico as children and were unmarried at the time of the interview. Those who migrated at an advanced age (and were married with children), remained married at the time of the interview. When looking at the intersection between marital status and gender, one can identify that there is a larger presence of unmarried and separated men, compared with women.

Additionally, half of the sample had children during the time of their migration experience in the USA. This finding is closely related to the age factor discussed earlier; it is to be expected that a group of participants who emigrated at an early stage in their life would marry and/or have children during the subsequent years. At the time of the interview, participants had a combined total of 128 children, more than half of whom were born in Mexico (73), and the remainder of whom were born in the USA. I will analyse this aspect in greater detail later in this chapter, however I will highlight here that at the time of the interview, many of those children born in the USA were still living in the USA separated from their parents (mainly fathers). Accordingly, an aspect that became highly relevant for participants during the return decision-making process was family unity or separation.

These findings related to age and change in marital status/family circumstances echo what has been written by other authors who acknowledge that two of the characteristics of current Mexican return flows are that: 1) there is a significant presence of young, male adults (including those from the 1.5 generation) in a productive and reproductive age, and children (US-born) (Gandini et al. 2015; González-Barrera 2015; Rivera-Sánchez 2011); and 2) families have mixed immigration status and are being separated by the current USA immigration policies, which is problematic and impacts all family members differently (Hagan et al. 2008; Medina 2016; Rodríguez and Hagan 2004).

With regard to level of education and occupation, as mentioned in the last chapter, only some participants managed to study while in the USA. While returnees living in the urban site report higher levels of education (including English proficiency) upon return, research shows that overall, when compared with the Mexican population living in the USA, returnees are relatively less educated. The highest return rates are among people with less than high school levels of education (Gandini et al. 2015:84). Regarding occupation, as aforementioned, the majority of participants worked in the service sector (as cooks,

gardeners, housekeepers and in childcare), the construction sector or in factories. Fewer participants managed to establish their own businesses, became students, had a professional job or decided to join a gang. In this regard, we can also identify a higher level of professional and gang experience in the urban site compared with the rural site, where most participants had experience in services (mainly working in restaurants). As we will see in the following sections, these aspects will be closely intertwined with participants' motivations and the nature of their return, which would later shape their (re)integration experiences.

5.2. Motivations for returning to Mexico or remaining in the USA

When I asked the question, 'why do migrants living in the USA return to Mexico?', the two main reasons given were deportation and family commitments. As other reasons mentioned were diverse, I have grouped and organised them into several categories depending on the apparent degree of agency involved in each circumstance (Figure 8). The four categories used were those proposed in Chapter 2, with 'voluntary' and forced categories at each end of the volition spectrum and, in the blurry middle, compelled due to structural constraints and compelled due to personal and gendered life course constraints.

Figure 8. A return continuum

Forced return
Deportation
Compelled return due to structural constraints
Being unable to access university
Being unable to access job opportunities for people with higher education
Dissatisfied with working conditions (long working hours, not having benefits)
Experiencing racism and discrimination
Losing job and being unable to find another due to the financial crisis
Visa expiry
Compelled return due to personal and gendered life course constraints
Consequence of ending a relationship
Getting married
Inability to cope and adapt (related to personal aspects)
Need to take care of ill, disabled and/or older people
Join family in Mexico for not having sufficient financial resources for them to be in the USA
Wanting children to grow up in Mexico

'Voluntary' return
Retirement, pensioners
End of the project
Start business

Source: Fieldwork with return migrants in Huaquechula and Mexico City.

As we will explore later in this chapter, motivations to return are shaped by mutually overlapping factors. Consequently, when talking generally about why Mexicans return 'home', I found it interesting and surprising that all participants gave single reasons. However, it is worth highlighting that while this categorisation is useful to better understand migrants' return motivations, it oversimplifies their realities. Migrants' return narrations and motivations are far more complex than those presented in the above table. Moreover, people's reasons for returning also have to be counterbalanced by their reasons not to return.

Why do people not come back? Because they are afraid. They know it [life in Mexico] will not be easy, they know life there [USA] is not the best and they will never be free because of not having documents, but they are afraid to start again [a life] in Mexico...and it is totally valid, it is very hard to do it.

As Elba's (MC, 23) quote above indicates, I also asked why people other than the participants do not return to Mexico. There were four responses which were constant in people's narratives. The first one is "migrants do not come back because they made a life in the USA, either with documents or without them." This includes those considered as the 'good' migrants who managed to succeed in finding a job, getting documents, marrying and building a family 'over there' (and who would sometimes come back for temporary or seasonal returns, but never permanently); the 'failed' migrants, who are surviving on the minimum wage to make the ends meet; and those who are seriously struggling (e.g. abusing substances, jobless and/or homeless). Many of the participants mentioned that people under this category might have the desire to return, but this often remains a myth or a fantasy (Anwar 1979; Bolognani 2016).

A second common response was that migrants who do not return either do not have, or decided to leave behind, their responsibilities (e.g. spouse and children, an ill parent, or properties to look after) in Mexico or, in fact, care about their responsibilities so much that they cannot walk away from them (e.g. continue paying for the education of their children, finish building a house). In other words, the likelihood of return is heavily related to the migrant's life course and the number of people who 'depend' on them (Erdal and Ezzati

2015:1212). A third reason for remaining in the USA that was mentioned was that people are afraid of what they would or would not find in Mexico. People who fled due to the bad overall socio-economic conditions in Mexico (e.g. lack of employment, access to education or access to healthcare; generalised violence and insecurity) know that the conditions back in their communities have not improved. This resonates with assertions made by Long and Oxfield (2004:1), “in some cases, despite the desire to return, due to the existing social, economic and political conditions, the return may be neither possible nor convenient, particularly when the state or place of origin reveals itself as unsafe and unwelcoming.” A fourth highly repeated response was that if things did not go well upon return participants “were afraid of not being able to cross back to the USA.” This response highlights the decrease in the old circularity of the Mexico-USA migration pattern, resulting in a ‘caging effect’ (Massey et al. 2014:1017).

Lack of return as well as return itself are both complex and might elicit questions and judgements from family and broader social networks which have an impact on an individual’s autonomy (Doyal and Gough 1992). As I will address post-return complexities in Chapter 7, in this chapter I will focus on non-return. It was interesting to observe that while those who decided to stay in the USA were described as successful and were admired for being able to get documents or find good jobs, they were also criticised for not conforming to (gendered) social norms and expectations. Several times they were called the “black sheep” of the family for not returning ‘home’ to fulfil their responsibilities or their families’ expectations, or they were deemed “rootless traitors” for trading their cultural identity and adopting the American lifestyle which “lacks values and meaning”. In the words of Simon (H, 40), “they [people who stay in the USA] don’t like it here anymore, they forget who they are, they leave their families and community behind...their only commitment now is to money.” These diverse opinions might represent a real pressure and pull factor for many to return, especially for those originally from rural areas where community cohesion, cultural identity, family and social status have a strong weight with its members.

5.3. Temporary and permanent return

‘Return mobilities’ include various types of ‘home’ visits, temporary stays and more permanent returns (King and Christou 2011). As mentioned in Chapter 4, almost two-thirds of my research participants interrupted their stay in the USA. This means that they travelled to Mexico at least once within those years living abroad. Participants had various ‘temporary

returns': for many men these were occasional returns described as breaks from their "boring and tiring" lives as migrants. Some others returned for a specific family duty such as providing care for an ill relative or attending the funeral of a loved one. In the case of women, some of them returned to Mexico temporarily to give birth and/or leave their children under their parents' care so that they could go back to their full-time work without the need to pay for childcare. As these returns had a very specific purpose, all participants quickly went back to continue with their lives in the USA. While they were few, some participants clearly stated that their visits had the purpose of assessing the situation back 'home' as part of their return preparations. During these visits, migrants could see the living conditions of their family, how the remittances that they were sending were being used, and the changes occurring in their communities. These trips proved to be extremely informative and helped migrants to make decisions regarding their continued migration and/or return. Additionally, these return practices brought new experiences, feeding the 'return imaginaries'⁷⁵ and discourses of a continuous inner dialogue regarding a potential more permanent return (Lulle 2014). As an example, Hugo's (H, 47) migration journey lasted for 22 years, of which he lived 13 in the USA and eight in Mexico. When I asked him about his multiple trips, he elaborated:

Since the plan was always to come back to Mexico with my family, I was never interested in making a life there [USA]. I always had small goals... like milestones. For example, first I finished the house, then I was saving to buy a car but my son got ill and the money went to his treatment, after that I bought the car [...] finally I built a small chapel for the town.... These [visits] helped me to stay connected with my family and community, be aware of my family needs and have a sense of achievement... every time I visited I could see the results of my work, this gave me motivation to go back [to the USA] and work harder than the previous year.

Some other participants had longer stays in Mexico, in some cases these temporary returns were initially considered permanent. For example, Hernan (H, 37) returned to Huaquechula after two years of living in the USA, and described his first experience as "quite disappointing" and was not interested in going back. Three years passed, Hernan got married and they had a baby. Faced with his gendered responsibilities recently acquired, such as the need to build a house for his family, he decided to re-migrate. This time, Hernan stayed in the USA for six years. Hernan's situation was similar to that of others who

⁷⁵ These migration imaginaries can powerfully influence integration patterns, including a reluctance to integrate into the host society if the idea of return is always present (Cassarino 2004).

considered being in Mexico ‘permanently’ until a new pressing need motivated them to re-migrate, thereby becoming a temporary returnee (Kuschminder 2017:18).

Conversely, many others initially considered their return as ‘temporary’ but circumstances meant that they became permanent. As an example, Elba (MC, 23) was an outstanding student in the USA who, due to her remarkable performance, was awarded a scholarship which would enable her to pay the tuition fees and living expenses during her university education. Elba could not believe that her “dream had come true” but her elation was brief as the university requested that she regularise her status. After consulting with a lawyer, Elba did not think twice and, after 11 years of living in the USA, she decided to return to Mexico to apply for a student visa. Once in Mexico, she did not manage to fulfil all the visa requirements and her application was consequently denied. Faced with this situation, Elba ‘decided’ to stay and try to continue with her education in Mexico.

When participants were asked whether or not they planned to remain in Mexico, 11 people mentioned that they were back on a temporary basis, 30 said that they were back to stay permanently and 19 others were still unsure. A common comment was that people were no longer eager to return to the USA undocumented, either because of the risks of crossing the Mexico-USA border or being unable to cover the *coyote* (smuggler) fees. For example Juan (MC, 53) said,

Taking into account how things are at the [Mexico-USA] border nowadays, it is better to stay still [remain in Mexico]. The last time I heard, they [smugglers] were asking for 7000 [USD] for someone to get to Chicago. Imagine that! How would I pay that amount for each one [four] of us? If I had that money I would rather start a business here in Mexico.

Lastly, some of those who were in a ‘wait and see’ mood revealed that they were evaluating their options: either to relocate within Mexico, plan to get a USA visa (the most commonly mentioned way was to wait to be sponsored by their US-born children) or to travel to other countries such as Brazil, China, Germany and Spain. While this aspect will be further analysed in Chapter 7, it is evident that for many of the participants, their return did not necessarily mean that they had reached the end of their migration cycle.

5.4. Narratives of return

Earlier in this chapter I briefly presented the responses that research participants gave to the question, ‘why do Mexican migrants living in the USA return to their ‘home’ country?’. To complement the general picture given above and provide a more comprehensive

understanding, I scrutinised my interviewees' own narrations of return. I will use the four categories proposed earlier with the intention of presenting several degrees of agency, from a category which incorporates those migrants who were forced to leave by the USA government to one which includes those who decided to return with apparent 'free will'. It needs to be clarified that participants' motivations to return do not divide neatly into the four categories set out. Most participants combine complementary motives and explanations for their return. I have, therefore, based this classification on the motivation which ultimately triggered their return and/or the one identified as key to their return. It is worth highlighting that in this section I will introduce the way in which aspects such as emigration and integration experiences in the USA, as well as personal circumstances, contextual factors and structural constraints may have influenced their experiences of return.

5.4.1. Forced return

As defined previously in Chapter 2, this return is involuntary and it is performed by either the initiative of either the 'home' or (usually) the host state. For the purpose of this research, when I refer to deportation I will include 'voluntary departure' and 'administrative removal' of a migrant from the USA due to the lack of possession of a residency permit, working in breach of their conditions of residence or as a consequence of being charged with criminal offences. This return includes either an administrative or judicial procedure prior to leaving the host country which, in many cases, signifies spending time in detention.

Reasons for deportation included crossing the border without documents, or committing a minor or an aggravated crime. Out of the total number of participants (60), 11 were removed. All but one were males and the majority were from Mexico City, which echoes Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2013) gendered removal finding introduced earlier in this chapter. As for the reasons for removal, only four of these 11 participants were deported as a consequence of committing a criminal offence. Therefore, the generalised perception that return migrants are "criminals who have been deported", or 'bad *hombres* (men)' in Trump's terminology, is likely to be overstated. As we will see later in this thesis, this misconception is extremely harmful for people who have been removed from the USA and contributes to rendering many other returnees, who have not been deported, as either stigmatised or invisible. The following excerpt will introduce us to the experience of Roberto (H, 40), who lived in the USA for 17 years:

One day, I went out with my family to an amusement park, while paying for something I handed over a false banknote ... I was not aware that I had that bill [...] but they

called the police. When the police arrived, they asked many questions, I told them I was not aware that the money was fake, they checked my wallet looking for more false money but they did not find any. In the end, I guess they believed I was not responsible for that note and they let me go, but not before asking for my social security number and taking some photos of me. I always think I was in the wrong place, at the wrong time... Soon after that, ICE⁷⁶ [officers] showed up at my home, they came after me, they had my photo [...] when you have 'that problem'⁷⁷ they do not ask anything, they do not even give you the chance to see a judge, they just take you and *vas pa'fuera* (take you out). That is how it happened, very fast. I spent eight days in prison, in the end they gave me a paper to sign [voluntary departure] and told me I would not be allowed to come back for 10 years [...] I was caught in New York, then I was moved to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas and finally I was deported to Ciudad Juarez [border city with the USA]. I am not sure why they take you from place to place, I think it is for you to feel it [the deportation process] 'harder'. You call your family and say 'I am here', and suddenly they take you somewhere else, you do not even have time to tell anyone, you do not know where you are, you feel lost... afraid. When you enter that prison [immigration detention centre], your entire world crumbles, all you want is to leave and put everything behind you.

Roberto's (H, 40) narrative helps us to understand how the current immigration enforcement system is implemented in the USA and how people experience it. While Roberto understood that, due to his 'voluntary departure' order, eventually he would have to leave the USA, and at certain points during his interview he mentioned being ready for it, the detention and removal process was quite shocking for him and his family. Similarly, Hector (MC, 25) and Nadia (MC, 35) experienced their deportation as a violent removal from what, at one point or another, all participants described as their 'home' country.

As previously mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the IIRIRA allowed crimes which were not defined as aggravated felonies to become cause for deportation, even if the people convicted had completed their prison sentences. Charlie (MC, 22), Diego (MC, 38), Edgar (H, 37) and Paco (H, 37) also experienced deportation but, in their cases, they were removed from the USA as a consequence of charges for minor crimes related to alcohol consumption, such as drinking on the street or driving under the influence of alcohol. Other authors have identified that there is increased alcohol and drug use among Mexican migrants, especially men, in the USA as a (gendered) way to self-medicate distress; however, in the case of undocumented youth, especially young men, this behaviour has also been related to life choices that reflect less self-care, increased impulsiveness and risk-

⁷⁶ US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

⁷⁷ Roberto had been detained 16 years earlier and been given a 'voluntary departure' order that he ignored.

taking tendencies (Gonzales et al. 2013). These gendered practices are considered vulnerabilities that undermine men's wellbeing and health status, making them more likely to enter into criminal practices and becoming deported. When Charlie finished high-school, he realised that due to his undocumented status he would be unable to go to university unless he managed to raise the money to pay for the tuition fees⁷⁸. As a result, he decided to stop studying and went through a difficult period during which he had issues with the law, which in turn jeopardised his life in the USA:

I just went wild and I did a lot of everything...2011 was my worst year. I would go to the [night] club, I would get drunk, do coke, crazy stuff! Once, I was coming back from the club with some friends, I was drunk and driving at a high speed. I was stopped [by police] and that was when I knew I had a VIP pass to Mexico [...] I was locked up [in jail] for a week. Surprisingly, after my release, I was treated as a regular American. I was sent to court and the judge waived all the charges except for the DWI (driving while impaired). I was banned from driving for a year and sent to do community service, but they said nothing about my immigration status [...] After two years I got a letter from immigration, that is when I got hit... I had to go to immigration court. I thought they had forgotten me! At that point I was already in college, I was paying the full fees all by myself, I had a stable job, I had a girlfriend... I felt I was doing good! I thought about applying for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) but I knew I was going to be rejected because of the DWI. My girlfriend even proposed [marriage] to me so I could stay but the lawyer said it would not be of any help at that point. So I had to sign a 'voluntary departure' and leave the country, they gave me three months... three whole months of torture. I was worried, I had no idea about life in Mexico, I only knew my grandma and my auntie...I did not know how it [life] would be.

Furthermore, the IIRIRA introduced the mandatory detention and deportation of immigrants with temporary or permanent residency who had committed any criminal offence. This measure was applied retroactively to all migrants who were convicted of felonies in the years prior to the implementation of the law (Ellerman 2009:81). Therefore, Armando (MC, 45), Moises (MC, 30), Ricardo (MC, 36) and Tony (H, 37), despite their documented status (as green card holders), were all removed from the USA due to this policy. In their interviews, they all mentioned their awareness that penal incarceration was an expected outcome of the crimes committed: in the words of Tony (H, 37) "laws are harsher over there [the USA], it is hard to find a policeman who is corrupted...you commit a crime, you pay for it." Nonetheless, immigration detention and deportation were considered unfair punishments

⁷⁸ Instead of being able to apply for scholarships or access loans from private institutions, such as banks, like other students. Additionally, access to public colleges depends on the state of residency. In the case that undocumented migrants manage to access university education, they can be requested to pay out-state tuition fees which increases the cost by more than double.

and to this day these participants carry the “sense that wrong was done to them” (Hasselberg 2014:6). As an example, Ricardo (MC, 36) mentioned that, five years after his return to Mexico, he still struggles to cope with his deportation. “I cry because they changed my life without my consent...I am away from my family, my children, my wife. I would do anything to go back home with my children.” It is clear from this quote that ‘home’ for Ricardo is not Mexico, where he was born and spent his early life, but the USA, where his wife and, especially, his children are.

Moises and Tony, due to the length of time spent in the USA, having started families there and given their attachment to the culture and the country, felt tempted to fight for the opportunity to stay but were unable to pay for legal representation and/or were not willing to remain in detention any longer. Armando and Ricardo did fight to stay: both of them stood trial to obtain a pardon for the crimes committed and therefore be able to stay in the USA, yet both their petitions were denied. All four were removed from the USA, leaving all that they knew behind. Hasselberg (2014) suggests that the deportation of foreign-national offenders operates as a type of ‘social death’, as they are no longer given the opportunity to reintegrate into their ‘new’ (for them, ‘home’) society, communities and families. This was a perception reflected throughout the narratives presented above.

Whether deportation was a result of crossing the border without documents, or committing a minor or an aggravated crime, all participants experienced their deportation as unclear, unfair and, in most cases, traumatic. To differing degrees, people experienced detention and deportation - including how they were treated (e.g. being isolated, not being informed of what was happening, being treated inhumanely) as violent and a type of punishment, which haunted them even after their return to Mexico. Hall (2012) argues that detention is not operationalised solely as a border control tool. Rather, using detention and deportation, governments have established mechanisms through which migrants (who majority are men) become criminalised, while being portrayed as ‘illegal’, undesirable and/or a threat. Furthermore, authors have documented how these deterrence strategies affect human dignity⁷⁹, the overall human wellbeing of migrants (including losing their patrimony, sense of self, family and social relations) and alters perceptions of the present and future

⁷⁹ For the purpose of this research, I will use the definition of human dignity used by Sensen (2011:73): “An inherent value property on the basis of which one can claim rights from others: one has rights because of one’s intrinsic and objective preciousness. In justifying human rights, the good (dignity) is prior to a principle stating what is right; and human rights as entitlements – which are justified by the good – are prior to the duties of the agent.”

for those who experience it, which in turn may affect their (re)integration process negatively (DeBono 2013, 2017; Hasselberg 2014; Sager 2011).

5.4.2. Compelled return due to structural constraints

The decision to return for people in this category is driven by structural reasons related to governmental policies or the consequences of those policies. It is defined by the presence of physical, psychological, or material pressure on the migrant by the state or host society. In total, 13 of my participants came under this category; most of whom were from the urban site and included an equal number of women and men. Reasons for compelled return due to structural reasons included: joining a 'significant other' who had been deported; fear of deportation; being unable to access university education; and feeling discriminated against as a consequence of their undocumented status, being a migrant, and/or Mexican.

An interesting element present in many of the cases under this category is multi-causality, in other words, interviewees presented me with various motives or causes for their return. I believe that this aspect was not present in the forced return category because multi-causality is closely related to the degree of agency that participants felt they had in their decision-making process. With regard to the first motivation for return mentioned above, Claudia (MC, 43) recounted her circumstances as follows,

While in detention my husband told me "Claudia, I am paying taxes and I have invested money in this country, they have no right to treat me like this...I will never come back [to the USA]". Many times I begged him to come back [after he was deported to Mexico], but he refused. So I thought "my place is with him, I am his wife, he was the one who had bad luck but it could have been me; now I have to be with him, I need to support him". That is why I decided to come back to Mexico.

Family reunification is identified in the literature as one of the most common reasons for Mexican migrants to return to their country of origin (Arriola-Vega 2014; BBVA and CONAPO 2015; González-Barrera 2015; Papail and Arroyo 2004; Pries 2004). While several authors have looked at this aspect of return, their focus has been on reunification with family members who remained in Mexico. Thus far, I have not been able to find literature that focuses on family reunification as a consequence of the forced return of a family member. Angeles (MC, 62), Arturo (MC, 36), Claudia (MC, 43) and Lulú (MC, 23) were motivated to return because a close family member was deported. Lulú was 17 years old when her mother was deported and, due to her young age, she reports a lack of space for negotiation and feeling compelled to join her mother back in Mexico. Contrary to Lulú's case, Angeles, Arturo and Claudia mentioned that they had a certain degree of agency while making their

decision but they all decided to return because they felt “the moral duty” to support their loved ones (son, wife and spouse, respectively) in Mexico. Claudia, for example, said that “I did not want to do it, and now I even regret my decision. But at that time I felt that in the eyes of God (and my children), I would be abandoning my husband, and that felt wrong.” As we will examine later in this chapter, the pressure that Claudia felt to conform to gendered moral norms and social expectations represented a push factor for many other women, limiting their autonomy to take decisions based on their own needs and life expectations.

De Genova (2002) defines ‘deportability’ as undocumented migrants’ awareness that they could be deported at any time. He states that this awareness reduces migrants’ capacity to challenge exploitative labour conditions and, as will be seen in the case of Janet (MC, 35), puts them in an extremely vulnerable position. Janet was 20 years old and had lived in the USA for five years without documents when she became pregnant. Due to the nature of her job, she and her spouse worked and lived at their employer’s house. Janet mentioned being very unhappy with her work conditions and feeling afraid of her employer, describing her as abusive and dishonest. Upon her baby’s delivery, Janet felt extremely vulnerable due to her ‘deportability’ and therefore decided to go back to Mexico in order to avoid the risk of being deported and separated from her child. These narrations help us to expand our understanding of forced return, considering how it mobilises not only the individuals who were removed but also their families and those who are ‘at risk’ of being deported. Moreover, through their narratives these participants bring the phrase *voluntariamente a fuerza* (forced willingness) to life, showing how it felt as though they had little room to exercise their autonomy within the current immigration context in the USA, especially when coupled with the need to conform to the gendered moral responsibilities (of being a good mother) that they had towards their loved ones.

Another significant group compelled to return due to structural reasons are ‘*los otros dreamers*’ (the other dreamers). In the USA, the political term ‘DREAMer’ was conceived in 2001 to identify those undocumented youth and young adults (considered part of the 1.5 generation) who would become direct beneficiaries of the DREAM Act⁸⁰. In Mexico, authors and activists (see Anderson and Solis 2014; Landa 2014) have coined the term ‘*los otros dreamers*’ to refer to young adults who were born in Mexico, migrated and were raised in the USA, and who returned to Mexico either ‘voluntarily’ or were deported.

⁸⁰ The DREAM Act aimed to provide temporary protection from deportation for those who entered the USA before their 15th birthday and who had no criminal record, to study, work or join the military.

The narrations of Carlos (MC, 35), Damián (MC, 23), Elba (MC, 23), Luis (MC, 32) and Natalia (MC, 28) are helpful in illustrating the convoluted process of a 'voluntary' return in the cases of undocumented migrants of the 1.5 generation. While these participants' returns were motivated by their need for personal and professional development, they were triggered by their inability to access university in the USA due to the restrictive policies at that time (prior the approval of the DREAM Act in 2012), or the realisation that despite their education, they will never be able to access formal employment. These participants decided to return to Mexico rather than live with an uncertain future and face the risk of being expelled from the USA.

As was introduced in the last chapter with the cases of Luis (MC, 32) and Natalia (MC, 28), the inclusion of young undocumented migrants into public schooling has been considered by Gonzales (2011) as a state of 'suspended illegality', which is characterised by the lack of realisation of the full implications that their undocumented status would have for their futures. The transition to adulthood for migrants from this 1.5 generation is characterised by their inability to continue with their education, obtain a drivers' licence, or to find the job that they expected to. Natalia's experience is one example of many for whom this clash between their scholarly ambitions and their undocumented status becomes a turning point which triggered their 'voluntary' return, "I continued with my [college] education and worked in the afternoons but I realised that as long as I remained undocumented, I would never be able to move on...I would always have the same shitty jobs."

Many of the 1.5 and second generations of certain immigrant groups are in reciprocal financial relationships with their parents, often supporting them (Rumbaut and Komaie 2010) and/or the entire household. As a result, they do share a good proportion of the stresses and responsibilities of adult roles. Luis viewed his move to Mexico as an opportunity to continue with his higher education and achieve a more promising career than that of his father but also as an opportunity to achieve autonomy, in other words, an independent life far from his gendered role as the eldest son (second breadwinner of the family) and what he considered to be 'unbalanced' responsibilities between him and his siblings:

During that time, I was studying [at community college] during the day, and working at nights. Once I finished college it did not make much sense to continue working with my dad. All the money that my father and I were making in our (very informal and rudimentary) [cleaning] company was used to pay our rent, and later the mortgage and food, in general, family expenses [...] At a point I thought it was unfair; first, I did not receive any salary, and second, I did not want to be the one responsible for 'feeding' my siblings anymore. Additionally, I did not want to work as a janitor for

the rest of my life, I had bigger plans for myself... that is when I seriously considered coming back to Mexico. "OK if I cannot join a university here [the USA], in Mexico I would be able to do so, after all, I am Mexican, over there they cannot reject me" ... I thought.

Despite the passing of the DREAM Act in 2012, many young migrants like Charlie (MC, 22) do not qualify for regularisation and are faced with the same challenges as any other undocumented migrant. Moreover, given the present government's stand on immigration, the future of DACA and the 750,000 young immigrants currently protected from deportation is at stake. These Dreamers' narratives help us to expand our understanding of the ways in which the draconian structures in place affect members of the 1.5 generation who, through their incorporation into the cultural, educational and social spheres in the USA, have developed dreams and expectations of a better life and are then faced with the need to return to Mexico (the exact place where their parents did not have access to opportunities) in order to try to fulfil those dreams and regain autonomy.

Some other participants voiced their need to interrupt their migration cycle due to tiredness and disillusionment regarding their lives in the USA (Cassarino 2016). Patricia (MC, 38), Juan (H, 49) and Javier (H, 42) experienced situations that caused them to leave the USA with a feeling of bitterness. Due to political problems, Patricia lost her organisation and her job, and Javier and Juan grew tired of being (mis)treated due to their status as 'undocumented Mexican migrants'. Patricia is one of the few participants that became a USA citizen but that was not enough to make her feel that she "belonged". Either documented or undocumented, the three of them managed to build lives in the USA for a long time, during which they fantasised about their return to their 'homeland'. In this regard, as Lulle (2017) asserts, the difficulties of being accepted in a new place may create a pull towards 'home', a place which may become idealised as a place of 'refuge' where one can really belong (see also Cassarino 2004).

5.4.3. Compelled return due to personal reasons and gendered life course constraints

It is defined by the presence of psychological or material pressure on the migrant, most commonly related to (mental) health matters or gendered cultural and/or family roles. Almost half of the participants of this research mentioned factors related to their gendered life course as their main reason to return, which makes it the most commonly mentioned return motivation, with almost an even number of participants from both sites. Under this category, I identified three main narratives: older age and health concerns, family (older parents')

health problems, and being drawn or compelled to return by family circumstances or 'significant others'. As we will see in detail later in this chapter, particularly children and older parents who remain in the country of origin constitute a significant pull-factor for migrants to return, especially for women from the rural site, raising questions about the intersection of gender and rural status limiting the prospects of many women from Huaquechula of staying in the USA. With regard to the degree of agency that they had during the decision-making process, participants mentioned that, while in many cases the decision was rushed by a sense of emergency and worry, they felt they had a certain degree of autonomy to decide to return to Mexico or remain in the USA. Despite being compelled by the circumstances, in most cases participants felt a sense of doing the 'right thing'. This finding resonates with other studies (Buja 2015; Constable 1999; Olwig 2012) which analyse this ambivalence with regard to independence and submission to gender norms. However, the majority lament being forced to remain in Mexico permanently ('involuntary immobility') due to their inability to obtain a USA visa or pay the *coyote* fee.

Once I fell down while washing the floors in the kitchen, I sued the restaurant arguing that I fell because I did not have the proper equipment to do my job. I lost the case, and even though they paid for a surgery and some rehabilitation, I never felt the same [...] Since then I have been in constant pain, especially in cold weather. I continued working for several years, but at a point I felt very worried for my health, I used to think "what would happen if I worsen? What would happen if I become paralysed? My son would have to deal with me. How would he pay for it [medical care]?" Over there [the USA], there is no way I could pay for my treatment, so there was no option, I had to come back before I became a burden for my son.

Like Valeria, Joel (MC, 53) also decided to return to Mexico due to his illness. While they both lived in the USA for several years, during which time they were aware of their health problems and had access, to a certain extent, to health care, as time passed their physical capacity deteriorated and their ability to work diminished, thereby reducing their income. However, it was not until they aged that they decided to return. Similarly, during his last years in the USA, Eduardo (MC, 65) faced a significant reduction in his income. As a consequence of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, he lost his job in the construction sector and was unable to find another stable job due to his advanced age. For all three the main concern was becoming a burden on their 'significant others' while in the USA. In the words of Valeria: "over there, it is impossible to rely on the support of others, everyone has their own worries and needs." Valeria and Eduardo's sons were living in the USA during the time they were there but, like many other young migrants, they had started their own families

and, as undocumented migrants, were struggling to make ends meet. Due to their undocumented status, Eduardo, Joel and Valeria did not have access to health services beyond 'emergency care', nor support from the government as pensioners. Therefore, they preferred to return to Mexico where they knew it would also be hard to access services but the cost would at least be more affordable, but more importantly, that they would not affect their children.

Similarly, German (MC, 53) and Andres (H, 39) were motivated to return due to their health concerns. In their case, their drinking habits affected their health and their ability to function, thereby diminishing their ability to work. For both men, their drinking problem was triggered by a recent bereavement and deteriorated emotional wellbeing. German's wife had just died and Andres' wife returned to Mexico to take care of the children who had been under the care of their grandparents. Both of their returns were motivated by their need for support, a need that they believed would be better met in Mexico. These narrations support Durand's *rendimiento decreciente* (diminishing returns) hypothesis, according to which he argues that many long-term migrants living in the USA make the decision to return to Mexico when they realise that their physical performance and autonomy has begun to decline. If after the evaluation of the psychological, social and economic costs of staying in the USA, the migrant realises that these costs are higher than the benefits, people usually prefer to return home to enjoy a better 'quality of life' as well as a higher social status and autonomy than those that they experience in the USA (Durand 2004:114-115). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that drinking alcohol as a coping mechanism is more common for migrant men than women. This gendered practice undermines their wellbeing and health status making them more vulnerable.

Pilar's (MC, 39) following quote highlights that the ill-health of elderly parents back in the country of origin constitutes another important pull-factor for migrants to return:

Despite the fact that my husband had to leave the country [he had a 'voluntary departure' order due to a past criminal conviction], I decided to come back due to my mother's health. Maybe things happened at the same time for a reason, I told him "you can stay here, if you want to move to another state or continue paying for a lawyer it's up to you. I am going back." My mother was ill and I would never forgive myself if she died while I was away.

Additionally, Pilar's narrative highlights that various members of one family may have different motivations to return (Cassarino 2008; Erdal and Ezzati 2015). In this case, while Pilar stated that her desire to be with her sick mother was her main reason for return, her

spouse (also a participant in this research) mentioned the inability to obtain the pardon from the immigration judge (which would stop his removal) as the key factor motivating his return. Later in her interview, Pilar mentioned that she had sensed that her mother was not seriously ill, but that she had been thinking about returning for a long time. She felt very lonely in the USA being away from her family, and was also having problems with her husband. Pilar described her husband as very aggressive and 'psychologically abusive' and she reported feeling that she needed to be close to her family to receive support and feel safer. Therefore, Pilar jumped at the first excuse to return home. Despite the fact that she identified her mother's illness as her primary motivation, we can conclude that this was simply the factor that triggered her return to Mexico. Pilar's account brings to our attention the experience of women who hope to end an unpleasant situation experienced in the USA, and whose return is mainly about seeking increased psychosocial wellbeing (including autonomy) and safety. Other return motivations were related to problems or ruptures with people in the USA, or involved being drawn to, or compelled by, a 'significant other'. In David's case (H, 31), he stated that his return was motivated by problems with his mother-in-law, who disapproved of his relationship with her daughter (as she was 18 years old which is legally considered underage in the USA but not in Mexico), and threatened to report him to the authorities. He and his wife decided to return to Mexico to distance themselves from her and find a safer place to start their family (relational wellbeing).

Conversely, the returns of other participants (interestingly all women) were motivated by a perceived need to keep their families together. Erika (H, 52), Tere (H, 48), Sandra (H, 40) and Sofia (MC, 30) explained in their interviews that their husbands' decisions to go back to Mexico motivated them to do the same. In Sofia's (MC, 30) words: "My husband's parents had some problems with a property they had and decided to come back. My husband said he would come back to help them and asked me if I wanted to join him. I said yes, *la familia es primero* (family comes first). Besides, what would I do there with two children on my own? [...] Now I regret it."

While Erika and Tere's narrations of their lives in the USA were predominantly focused on their careers (Tere ran the family business - a Mexican restaurant, and Erika was a manager at a factory), their accounts of the decision to return were prominently focused on their role as wives and/or mothers. As we will see in Chapter 7, these four women now rather regret their decisions to return, which were made primarily with the best interest of their children and spouses in mind (in order to preserve family unity). For these participants,

return to Mexico had a negative impact on their personal projects (material and psychosocial wellbeing) during their (re)integration processes.

If something clearly stands out from this section, the need to be reunited with their children drove return in many of participants' cases. In the cases of Berenice (H, 47), Esther (H, 37) and Rebeca (H, 33), the main motivation to return was to be reunited with their children living in Mexico. Berenice and Esther's children were born in the USA but were brought to Mexico and left under their grandparents' care. In Rebeca's case, her children were born in Mexico and were left behind when she decided to join her spouse in the USA. While these three participants migrated to the USA with the intention of staying for a finite period of time, as time passed and economic need remained, prolonged stays evolved. Therefore, it was necessary for them to adopt transnational mothering practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997), which included being in constant communication and fully responsible for covering their children's needs. While all three women mentioned how much they missed and wanted to be with their children, it was not until their life circumstances changed that they felt compelled to return. Berenice became pregnant (unexpectedly) for the third time and, when she realised that she would not be able to work anymore as planned, she decided to head back to Mexico. Esther and her child had established an agreement; the child would attend school in Mexico and visit the mother in the USA every summer. This agreement worked well until the child became older and refused to go to the USA anymore. Soon after, Esther decided to return. As for Rebeca, when her eldest child was 15 she realised that it was necessary for her to return, as her children were coming into an age "when they need the firm hand of their mother."

Another characteristic of this return was that, in some cases, participants opted for a 'stepwise' or 'staged' return (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992) whereby children and mothers would leave the USA first, and the men (as the breadwinner) would stay to work, save money and join them later. However, in several cases the men never returned to Mexico having as a consequence that, in many occasions, women became single mothers.

5.4.4. 'Voluntary' return

For the purpose of this research, a return is considered 'voluntary' when it is driven by the culmination of the migration cycle or project. While I am aware that migrants can still experience some pressure to leave due to a lack of opportunity to stay in the host/new 'home' country documented, people under this category often mentioned that they had never

been interested in remaining in the USA. Under this category, I was able to identify eight participants, mostly males from the rural site.

Piore (1979) states that migrants often arrive to the 'host' country with the intention to return after having met a goal, usually financial (e.g. accumulation of savings). These are regarded as 'target earners' (Massey 1987) and their return behaviour is consistent with the NELM theory. Hernan (H, 37), Lucy (H, 47), Luis (H, 35), Rogelio (H, 54), Silverio (H, 46) and Simon (H, 40) all said that what led to their return was having completed their 'migration goal'. For Luis and Silverio, the goal was to save enough money to set up a business back 'home'; for Rogelio it was to finish paying for his children's education; and for Hernan, Lucy and Simon it was to build a home for their family. Interestingly, these six participants had returned previously on a 'temporary' basis. As was illustrated by the cases of Luis and Hernan, introduced earlier in this chapter, while they had considered their previous return(s) as permanent, they all then, as the main breadwinners within their families, had unexpected and pressing financial needs that motivated them to migrate back to the USA to find a way to meet them.

Neither Adrian (H, 44) nor Ramiro (H, 55) had an established goal to achieve in Mexico, but after an evaluation of circumstances they decided that they had, in Cassarino's words, completed their cycle (2016). Adrian described his return as the right thing to do: "I thought, 'I have been working here [USA] more than 10 years, I got my house, some land and I have enough money saved... it is time to go back to Mexico.' I had thought about it before but I never set a date but this time I said, 'I will go back in five months and if I need to, I will come back [to the USA] later'." As for Ramiro, he considered his return as a retirement from his life in the USA and a chance to spend his last years "in my own land and be able to die here." Neither of them had a clear financial goal or a plan while living in the USA, however, after an initial assessment, they decided that they had enough money saved to start a business. Later in their interviews, one could discern that both these participants had personal plans which they did not consider as return motivations. Adrian was looking forward to getting married and having children, and Ramiro wanted to "redeem a life of evil" by presenting himself as "a sober new man who followed the word of God". As we will see in Chapter 7, migrants who were 'target earners' (Massey 1987) often described having more satisfying post-return lives than other participants due to their enhanced preparedness linked to their circular migration pattern and the enhanced agency used in their decision to return.

These findings contradict those of Bujan (2015), who stated that men express a discourse about return that is either about economic success or about “comparative advantage” regarding their quality of life in their destination and very rarely mention their worry and need for their family left behind. In this case, it was often for me to listen to men sharing their feelings of guilt, sadness and worry for being absent and their need to be reunited with their children.

5.5. Decision-making processes

Decision-making is the process of identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of the decision-maker. This process is considered as mainly cognitive, resulting in a final choice which may or may not prompt action. As we have seen in this chapter, interviewees’ decisions to return were in many cases confined to extremely constrained alternatives. Due to the circumstances faced, some participants’ final decisions to go back to Mexico were driven more by an obligation or necessity, than by free will. Despite this process being considered a cognitive one, my empirical evidence has shown us that, in many cases, respondents made their decisions based on assumptions, values, emotions and what they considered their moral duty, rather than objective information. Many participants’ decisions were made, in the best-case scenarios, out of love or hope, but in many others, out of frustration, fear or desperation. For example, Tony (H, 37) had the opportunity to hire a lawyer (financed by the gang he was a member of) and start a legal process to try to stop his removal from the USA. The lawyer told him that he had a fair chance of obtaining the ‘pardon’ from the judge, as he had spent the last 22 years of his life in the USA and his entire family, including his three children, were US citizens. However, when he realised that he might have to stay in prison for at least another couple of years, he decided to sign his ‘voluntary departure’ to secure his freedom and return to a country that he did not know. Tony’s decision was driven by despair and was based more on the need to be ‘out’ of prison rather than a desire to be back in Mexico.

As we have learnt from his previous excerpts, Luis’ undocumented status heavily influenced his (and that of many other participants) life in the USA, and later his decision to return. Like Luis, the narrations of many other respondents demonstrated the way in which being undocumented made them feel that their return was a definite and irreversible process:

This decision was not taken fast, I thought about it thoroughly and one day I told my parents, "I am going back to Mexico." I guess they did not believe me because it took me around two more years to finally come back. During that time, I continued working and saved money, finally came the day I bought my [plane] ticket, and then they believed me. [...] It was a decision taken consciously; I knew that if I was leaving the 'States', I would be unable to go back for at least 10 years. I took everything; I took [school] transcripts, my licence, all my documents... my life there was reduced to what I could bring in my suitcase.

As Luis highlights, on the one hand, many participants mentioned that it would be almost impossible for them to re-enter the USA as documented migrants because they were unable to meet visa requirements, such as proving financial liquidity or having a permanent job in Mexico. Similarly, other participants were afraid that while their visa applications were processed, they could be identified as having lived in the USA without the correct documentation and therefore be banned from entering the country. For those removed or with a 'voluntary departure', almost all of them had been restricted from applying for a USA visa for five to ten years and others were banned for life. On the other hand, as mentioned previously by Juan (MC, 53), going back to the USA without documents incurs a significant risk and requires a substantial financial investment.

Luis' quote also highlights the role of others in the decision-making process of return. Participants were often encouraged or discouraged, and in many cases both, by their relatives, friends, and others. People in Mexico would often encourage the return of their loved ones, arguing that they were very much missed and, in the cases of migrants who were not doing so well (e.g. were ill or drinking too much), friends and family were worried about their wellbeing. However, this was not always the case: people back in Mexico would often discourage migrants' return due to the impact that the lack of remittances would have on the family's economy. Discouragement also came from people who were to stay in the USA: they expressed concerns about the socio-economic context in Mexico, as well as the future separation from returnees. Participants mentioned on several occasions that their relatives' support of their decision to return, or lack thereof, rendered decision-making an even more convoluted process. For example, Mariana (H, 35) decided to return due to her mother's illness but was not well supported in this decision by those closest to her:

It was hard! I am a nurse and I wanted to be here for my mum, I knew no one would take care of her better than me but my husband did not want to come back so I told him many times "if you want, you can stay." In the end, I am glad he did not [stay], he realised that we had enough [savings], so we could try to make our lives back in Mexico. My brother [living in the USA] also discouraged me many times, saying that

the situation here [in Huaquechula] was too bad and I would regret my decision. I was afraid that things could go wrong [back in Mexico] and I would be blamed for it...

As Mariana's narrative shows, the decision to return can result in the separation of families and loved ones. Sometimes this separation would be temporary due to a 'stepped return', yet in many cases it would be permanent; affecting family structure and wellbeing in the long term. The vast majority of participants mentioned that their return separated them from their loved ones. Significant people left in the USA were members of their nuclear families (e.g. parents, siblings, spouses, children and grandchildren), as well as extended relatives and friends. Overall, these returns, in all their diversity and complexity, often leave in their wake complicated transnational kinship arrangements, particularly between elderly parents, siblings, spouses and children in need of care.

Once the decision was made (for those who could decide), preparing the return also required time to gather the information needed, mobilise resources and prepare emotionally. Cassarino (2004:271, 2008) argues that the propensity of migrants to be able to (re)integrate and become actors of change and development depends on, among other things, their return preparedness, which includes their willingness to return and ability to mobilise their resources. While there were various degrees of autonomy and willingness to return present in the narratives of my informants, two-thirds of my sample mentioned being able to prepare their return. Return preparation time was variable: a few mentioned that they had only several days to prepare, and a few others, like Luis, were able to spend years preparing. The most common answer was that participants had between one and three months to prepare. Some of the steps that returnees took to prepare their return were: to sell their assets, select important things to bring back with them (e.g. clothes, education certificates, electronics, work tools or equipment), say goodbye to friends and colleagues, and mobilise financial resources. As we will see in Chapter 7, despite the fact that people mentioned being prepared to return, in many cases, once they were back in Mexico, they realised that they had disproportionate expectations, did not have enough or accurate information, and/or had not taken the required identity and education documentation with them. Moreover, while returnees' decisions were very much influenced by their emotions, they had not considered the emotional implications of their move to Mexico.

5.6. Journeys and geographies of return

Respondents' journeys back to Mexico were influenced by their return motivations (including degree of agency), resources and ability to prepare. People who were removed from the USA spent time in detention and, as we saw earlier through Roberto's experience, were commonly moved to various facilities until their arrival on Mexican soil. People who were deported describe arriving in Mexico in a physical state (e.g. handcuffed, wearing dirty clothes, without shoelaces, with no or very little money, without Mexican ID⁸¹) and emotional condition that affronted their human dignity. Those who were able to return by their own means, depending on their time and resources, returned either by air or by land. Those who returned by air came back with minimal belongings, and those who travelled by land tended to bring vehicles that had been purchased in the USA and loaded with furniture, work tools, and other goods in the hope that these possessions would help them to establish their 'new' lives in Mexico.

During this journey, returnees experienced their first contact with Mexican authorities. As we will learn from Tere's (H, 48) experience, their reception by authorities is a significant first step which would impact their post-return experience:

Taking the decision was hard, but once we were clear with the idea we got excited about the return. Once we hit the road we were very happy to get to our town. The problem was when we entered Mexico, one feels very negative about returning. I did not like the way they treated us. Despite that we had all our documents in order [they got the authorisation from the consulate to import their household goods and cars], we were requested to pay a 'fine' at the border, arguing that we were missing 'this and that'. They detained us for eight hours trying to rip us off but we did not give them anything, I contacted the people from the consulate and after talking to them [consulate] they [border authorities] let us go. From the border, you realise how the situation is in the country, you just put a foot in here and you start regretting coming back.

As this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of what role the notion of place plays in the (re)integration experiences of returnees, in this section I will briefly identify how this aspect affected the motivations and decisions to return of migrants living in Huaquechula (rural site) and Mexico City (urban site) differently. With regard to participants in Mexico City, there were similar numbers of people under each category of return. When we compare these numbers with those from Huaquechula, we realise that higher numbers

⁸¹ Participants mentioned that their appearance made them an easy target for stigma and abuse. On the one hand, non-migrants identify them as "the criminals who were kicked out from the USA", on the other, they are seen by authorities, smugglers, taxi drivers and others as easy targets for extortion.

of people in the urban site were removed from the USA and were compelled to return due to structural reasons. In Huaquechula, there is a higher number of people pulled back to Mexico by family circumstances (compelled to return due to personal and gendered life course constraints) and who returned after completing their (financial) project ('voluntary' return).

Except in the cases of those returned by force (deportees), returnees' places of return seem to be related to their motivations. For those who returned due to personal and gendered life course constraints and/or as the end of their project, the majority went 'home' to join their families in Huaquechula. This finding is supported by research conducted by Masferrer and Roberts, who tell us that returnees are slightly more likely to be living in extended families in small rural communities located in non-traditional emigration states, such as Puebla (2012). Furthermore, Escobar (2012), and Rivera-Sánchez (2011) argue that returnees keep arriving in their (rural) communities of origin despite the fact that these are considered to be lagging locations. In addition to their need and desire to be with their relatives, their return 'home' may also be related to their social networks, cultural attachment, and financial investments undertaken transnationally (e.g. building houses and buying land) (see also BBVA and CONAPO yearbook of migration and remittances 2015:45).

With regard to post-return migration movements, while the number of participants who re-migrated was low, I found four different patterns. The first was that people returned to their place of origin and stayed there with no further movements planned or executed; hence there was no re-migration. The second was that participants returned to their place of origin and later moved to Mexico City; for example, when Moises (MC, 30) was deported he decided to go straight to his 'hometown', but later, due to his cousin's recommendation, he moved to Mexico City looking for a job where he could make use of his English language skills. The third pattern was that people first went to a place other than that where they were originally from, and later moved to their place of origin, either Mexico City or Huaquechula. For example, Sandra (H, 40) returned from the USA with her family to live in Puebla (capital city) in order to *probar suerte* (try their luck) with their new business. After a year, the business failed and they moved to Huaquechula, the place where Sandra is originally from and the cost of living is more affordable. The fourth pattern is a mixed experience: people first went back to their place of origin, later moved somewhere else and ultimately relocated to Mexico City. For example, Luis (MC, 32) returned to the state of Tamaulipas, where he is originally from, and stayed there for approximately five years. After completing his university

degree, he applied for a Masters and went back to live in the USA for one year and later, following completion of his studies, he decided to re-migrate to Mexico City in search for better employment opportunities. These post-return movements also highlight the fact that geographies of return may also be influenced by life course and structural constraints. Young people, as students and young professionals, may be compelled to return to urban locations such as Mexico City, where they find greater opportunities as well as more openness to their bi-cultural selves than in other locations. Individuals who intend to settle down with their families move to Huaquechula, where they may have established a business or acquired properties (e.g. agricultural land and/or a house) and the cost of living is more affordable.

5.7. Returnees' expectations upon return

I did not have any plan, but I knew I had to find a job immediately... My family were also deported a month after me, and I had to pay the bills of the entire family. The initial plan was to find a job where they paid the most, as I knew I was not in a position to choose and I would not be able to find something I liked or related to the experience I had in the USA; I took a job in a call centre. It was also necessary for me to find a job where I could use my English [language] since I knew I would not be able to survive just in Spanish... it was all a survival strategy.

Nadia's (MC, 35) interview excerpt above highlights the way in which migrants' expectations (or lack thereof) and needs are intimately related to their motivations and journeys of return. Similarly, other participants who were also forced or compelled to return, often did not have a chance to think about how their lives would be in Mexico due to the emotional struggles caused by the circumstances of their return. Others were so against the idea of having to make a life in Mexico that they planned to go back to the USA as soon as they crossed the border. For the half of my sample that mentioned having, in one way or another, expectations of their post-return lives, the expectation to *vivir mejor* (living well) was commonly mentioned. In this section, I will attempt to describe what constituted to 'live well' for the participants of this study.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, for some migrants their motivations to return were linked to their reasons to migrate (e.g. having completed building a house), and for some others to their lives while in the USA (e.g. wanting to study university). Therefore, their expectations upon return were intimately related to these motivations. For example, Lucy's (H, 47) main expectation was to see her house completed; and for Luis (MC, 32), it was to

complete his college degree. As for participants who intended to carry out family responsibilities in Mexico, such as Berenice, their expectations were to be with their children and be able to better support them. Unsurprisingly, all of these expectations were attached to the need to have a certain level of material wellbeing (economic stability) to enable them to provide a 'good enough life' for themselves and their 'loved ones'. Therefore, the overarching expectation that I encountered was that returnees were looking forward to finding a job and/or starting a business with the money accumulated while abroad.

Other common expectations of life upon return were associated with their psychosocial wellbeing (needs of relatedness, life enjoyment, personal safety, autonomy and social status). In terms of relatedness, participants, particularly young men from Huaquechula, often mentioned that beyond their expectations of getting a job and starting a business, they were looking forward to "settling down" as the culmination of a period of loneliness and sacrifice. In Paco's words (H, 37): "I wanted to have a business, work our land, maybe get some trucks, get married and have children... have a healthy and nice life." Being able to enjoy the culture and having a more relaxed life were other common expectations mentioned by participants living in Huaquechula. Luis (H, 35), who during his years in the USA had invested in a *sonido* (sound system) business which was hired for various local celebrations, said: "I always wanted to be back... there is nothing like my people and the parties here [Huaquechula]. After all that hard work, I was ready to have some fun." Personal safety was raised, at the same time, as a need and as a concern. On one hand, some participants, including Roberto (H, 40) who experienced detention while in the USA, and Pilar (MC, 39) who experienced domestic violence, shared their expectations of feeling free and safe upon their return. On the other hand, returnees such as Rodrigo (H, 59) mentioned their concern for their safety on both levels, physical and social, which made them feel rather uncertain and pessimistic about their future in Mexico. In his words,

I was afraid of the situation [insecurity] in the country. In the community there were rumours that return migrants and people who receive dollars [remittances] had been kidnapped... one gets afraid. Imagine if it happened to us, what would we do? We brought very little money; we would not be able to pay for any ransom. And beyond that, I was afraid people would discover us [the fact that they had very little money], I was ashamed.

With regard to autonomy and social status, during several years of living in the USA, Ana (MC, 43) dreamed of the possibility of having a professional job back in Mexico and enjoying a higher social position (see Constable 2004). During her interview, she mentioned feeling

“stuck” and needing to leave the USA to be able to make some progress in her career: “I wanted to have professional development, maybe study and have my own business, be my own boss! The children would go to school and grow with other (better) values, my husband would join us within a year, and everything would be finally alright.” Furthermore, in terms of social status, many participants were concerned about being perceived as a ‘failure’. While Rodrigo was one of the few participants to explicitly voice this concern, lack of economic wealth was a constant ‘shame’ that migrants, particularly men, experienced upon return. Rodrigo’s expectations (as those of many others) were intimately linked to his perceived need to conform to social norms and expectations which, as we will learn in Chapter 7, severely affected his wellbeing. In summary, the expectations of post-return life resembled those that participants had upon their arrival to the USA (e.g. to find a job to be able to support their families), yet a key difference was that people were more sceptical about their ability to fulfil their dreams in Mexico. For various reasons that I will describe later in this thesis, participants’ expectations were rarely met. While the majority of participants experienced disappointment upon return, others mentioned being satisfied with what they found, and a few expressed having found a better situation than expected.

5.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I identified key factors that were integral to Mexican migrants’ return motivations: gendered life course constraints and responsibilities; emigration motivations; integration experiences in the USA as well as contextual and structural constraints. With regard to gendered life course constraints, this chapter draws attention to the return motivations of returnees from various groups (other than young undocumented males) who are not usually considered in the research on Mexican return migration, such as older migrants, women, the 1.5 generation, and returnees in non-traditional locations of migration. This research supports other researchers’ findings that higher numbers of men than women are forcibly removed from the USA as a consequence of a gendered and racial removal policy, or return as a consequence of the completion of their (financial) projects conferred to them as the family main breadwinners. It additionally identifies that older migrants are often motivated to return by their need to access healthcare services, and their perceived moral duty as parents to avoid becoming a burden on their children in the USA; that young migrants from the 1.5 generation return to attempt to fulfil their aspirations of accessing qualified jobs and higher education; and that women’s motivations to return are primarily linked to their

feeling of responsibility to ensure family unity and to support their next of kin conferred to them by the traditional gender roles established within the Mexican culture. This diversity of Mexicans' return motivations highlights the necessity for researchers and policy makers to be cautious about making generalisations about returnees' characteristics and circumstances while developing policies which aim to promote their (re)integration, based on their differentiated needs, particularly for those who are most in need of support.

With regard to the ways in which pre-return experiences shaped the participants' return motivations, we can identify in this chapter that these are to some extent related to their original emigration motivations, but they are much more influenced by their lives in the USA. In relation to migrants' emigration motivations, we could say that people under the 'voluntary' return category were the only ones whose motivations of emigration and return were linked. Hernan, Lucy and Simon went to the USA to earn enough money to construct their homes back in Huaquechula, and as soon as they achieved this goal they went back 'home'. Conversely, with the exception of those who were pulled back to Mexico by their significant others' care needs, the returns were much more related to migrants' lives and integration experiences in the USA, primarily their inability to obtain immigration documents. For example, deportees' reasons for return were intimately related to contextual aspects but also to their gendered life circumstances as undocumented men in the USA which made them jeopardise their stay there, such as joining a gang and committing crimes. As for older migrants and 'dreamers', they decided to return as a consequence of a deterioration in their health or life aspirations developed through their lives in the USA, respectively.

With regard to agency, as we have learnt from the empirical data, there is no clear-cut distinction between forced and 'voluntary' migration, creating an extremely wide 'compelled' category. For most participants, the decision to return was often a response to a complex set of factors that both motivated and deterred return, affecting their resource mobilisation and readiness to return. Some of these factors were emotions and experiences related to their pre-return lives on both sides of the border; their post-return expectations of gaining more scope of action (e.g. autonomy, job mobility, freedom of movement), fulfilling their gendered life course obligations and/or professional dreams; and the information and advice provided mainly by family members. More importantly, due to the inability to obtain immigration documents to re-enter the USA, any type of return for undocumented Mexican migrants may be considered as a 'forced permanent' one which, as we will see in the

following chapters, shapes and influences their (re)integration experiences and human wellbeing.

Gender-role understandings and arrangements during the migration experience, among them the adoption of 'modern' values by women due to their enhanced contributions to the family economy and the different arrangements induced by the migration process itself (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992), had as a consequence enhanced self-esteem (seeing themselves more than a wife and mother) and provided them with a heightened leverage to participate equally with men in household decision-making. However, other researchers show that Mexican families may adopt increasingly egalitarian gender behaviour while still retaining elements of traditional culture (Baca Zinn 1980). This might explain why, no matter what their experiences were in the USA, at the moment of the decision about whether to return or not, women were confronted with the behavioural norms associated with being a 'good wife and mother'. This resulted in complicated decision-making processes where women often had to choose to fulfill their moral duty as mothers and wives, leaving behind their more comfortable lives in the US and the equality they had gained (Olwing 2012).

In the case of men, their migration experience is meant to fulfil their role as 'good men' by upholding the honour of the family and providing economically; at least by building a house and covering the household costs. The actual expectations are usually much higher still (e.g. start a business, purchase luxury things, support extended family members). These hopes represented a great burden for many of my interviewees, which made their decision to return very difficult. Several participants shared with me how being away from their families and communities made them feel very nostalgic which affected their psychosocial wellbeing and made them continually consider the possibility of going back. Not having been able to fulfil their own (financial) goal and family expectations always prevented them from going back and this made them feel worse still, which made them in many cases use alcohol as a coping mechanism. Furthermore, for those who were removed or decided to return without fulfilling their (and their family's) goal, it was considered a sign of failure and shame for being 'not men enough', affecting them equally once back in their communities.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a great number of participants changed their family circumstances, the majority of them by getting married and/or having children. Therefore, for many of them, return implied family separation, which also affected men and women differently. Women's return usually aimed to preserve family unity, particularly with their non-adult children. As a result of this, none of my female participants were separated from their

non-adult children at the moment of the interview, but as we will see in the next chapter, several got separated later on from their partners. As for the case of men, several were separated from their nuclear families (partners and children) due to their forced return. As we will see in the next chapter, the gender dimension of the migration and return experiences will add another level of complexity to the (re)integration of return migrants to Mexico.

6. The context of return

As a society and as a country, we have an ethical and moral duty to welcome them [return migrants] with open arms; to treat them with affection, respect and dignity; to ensure government effectiveness so that they can be promptly incorporated into the activities they wish to carry out in our country. In particular, we must ensure that their reintegration into national life is conducted with full respect for their human rights and that they have effective opportunities for personal and family development.

Enrique Peña Nieto
Mexico City, March 2017

This quote from the speech that the Mexican president gave to government officials during a ceremony in which he introduced the most recent amendments made to the General Education Law, provides a fitting introduction to this chapter which focuses on macro-level factors that influence the (re)integration of return migrants in Mexico. This chapter and the following one are the last in the sequence of four empirical analyses aiming to explore the overall migration experience of Mexican migrants, including emigration and settlement in the USA (Chapter 4), return (Chapter 5), to finally examine their post-return experiences of (re)integration (Chapters 6 and 7).

Penninx and colleagues conducted a study on integration in various European cities and concluded that “the receiving society, its institutional structure and its reactions to newcomers are consequently far more decisive for the outcome of the process than the immigrants themselves” (Penninx et al. 2004:142). Furthermore, Cerase, among other authors, has highlighted that contextual aspects at a macro level, such as norms and policies developed in countries and localities of return, as well as socio-economic factors, influence return migrants’ ability to (re)integrate (1974:259). As part of its theoretical framework, introduced in Chapter 2, this research approaches (re)integration as a multi-layered phenomenon with four specific dimensions – structural, social, cultural, and civic and political participation. As contextual aspects, such as the socio-economic environment and governmental policies and norms, are outside the scope of these proposed dimensions, I address them separately in this chapter. Therefore, the key elements utilised in this study to examine the context of return of Mexican migrants are the government’s (re)integration policies for return migrants, including the frameworks, policies and implementation practices (including access to institutions which is also part of the structural dimension), the socio-economic contexts and structural constraints affecting returnees’ (re)integration

experiences. Combined, these factors contribute to the analysis of how the environment at the macro level is favourable or adverse to return migrants' (re)integration into their two localities of study. Furthermore, in addition to understanding the experience of returnees in both localities, this chapter will elucidate how the national and local policies, and their implementation, shape returnees' (re)integration outcomes. It is worth highlighting that despite the fact that Mexico is a country with diverse and very complex migration flows (emigration, immigration, return and transit), due to the scope of this research I will solely focus on how existing government policies affect return migrants' (re)integration in Mexico.

6.1. (Re)integration policies, a historic review and current frameworks

For this chapter, I will use the framework proposed by Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) to analyse the process of how integration policies have been developed and implemented for this case study. According to these authors, the essence of policies is the intention to lead and direct different processes in a given society; in my case, the (re)integration process of return migrants into the Mexican society. Explicit integration policies are part of a normative political process in which the issue of integration is identified as problematic and there is the intention of addressing it. Consequently, the 'problematic' of integration is given a normative framing, and concrete policy measures are designed to be implemented to achieve a desired outcome. Additionally, as generic policies not specifically developed for migrants (e.g. education, health and labour) significantly influence their integration into a given society, it is often necessary to identify and analyse them alongside specific integration policies (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016:20).

The public policy and discourse on migration in Mexico have been influenced by the current context in the region where there are increased flows of transit asylum seekers and migrants (mainly but not exclusively coming from Central America) trying to reach the USA, lower numbers of undocumented migrants successfully reaching the USA, and an increased number of returnees and migrants in need of integration in Mexico. Two historical events that significantly influenced Mexican migration policies were the Global Financial crisis of 2008-2009 and the San Fernando massacre⁸² in 2011. In relation to the former, as a

⁸² In August 2010 authorities discovered 72 bodies of dead migrants near the border town of San Fernando in the state of Tamaulipas. All the victims were identified as transit migrants mainly from Central America. From the investigations conducted, it was concluded that the culprits of the murders were the Zetas drug cartel with the involvement of local authorities. Further investigations led to the identification of mass graves where another 193 corpses were identified in April 2011.

preventive measure the Mexican government launched the *Fondo de Apoyo a Migrantes* (FAM - Migrants' support fund) in 2009 as an initiative to support the development of infrastructure, projects or actions aiming to help return migrants, their families and organisations providing services for them⁸³. This became the first (re)integration policy targeting return migrants in Mexico during recent years, and was followed by the *Procedimiento de repatriación al interior de México* (PRIM – Returned migrants' assistance process). The PRIM was piloted in 2012 and launched in 2013 by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (INM 2016a – National Institute of Migration) in coordination with the IOM, and its main goal was to provide protection, guidance and support to deportees upon their return to Mexico. This reception included: (i) conducting a medical check-up (consisting of answering a questionnaire and receiving some vaccinations); (ii) providing a snack, the possibility of obtaining a bus ticket to return 'home' and a temporary identification (*Constancia de repatriación*); (iii) referring those in need to a local shelter where they could spend a couple of nights; and (iv) providing information regarding available employment opportunities within the country (INM 2016a). According to interviews with key informants, once the deportee left the reception point, he or she had no further contact with this programme.

Shortly thereafter, in 2011, the San Fernando massacre brought national and international attention to the critical human rights conditions in which migration takes place within Mexico. While the victims were transit migrants, due to the scrutiny of migrants' rights activists, the Mexican government was compelled to take steps towards the promotion and protection of all migrants' rights, including returnees. Therefore, in 2011, the Congress unanimously passed a new migration law according to which the government recognises that Mexico is not just a country of emigration and transit, but also of immigration and return (*Ley General de Migración* 2011). In terms of the return flow, in its second article this law proposes as one of its guiding principles to "Facilitate the return to the national territory and the social reintegration of Mexican emigrants and their families through inter-institutional programmes." Additionally, it aims to strengthen the links between the communities of origin and destination of Mexican migration for the benefit of the families' wellbeing and national and regional development (*Ley General de Migración* 2011).

⁸³ The FAM is a federal subsidy created to support the development of infrastructure, projects or actions aiming to help return migrants, their families and NGOs to: 1) find an occupation in the formal market; 2) develop options of self-employment; 3) improve their human capital and housing; and 4) shelter returnees temporarily and help them return to their place of origin, when appropriate (SHCP 2009:1).

Following the enactment of this new migration legislation and the consequent policy changes, in 2012 the *Unidad de Política Migratoria* (UPM - Unit for Migration Policy) was created with the aim of “improving coherence between the various migration actions of the Mexican government, and to more effectively comply with the principles and objectives of the law” (*Manual de organización específico de la Unidad de Política Migratoria* 2012). Alongside these changes, that same year (2012) the UPM's Advisory Council and the INM Citizen Council were created and assumed responsibility for providing advice and proposing specific actions that address the different dimensions of international migration in Mexico. In an effort to make these institutions (UPM and INM) democratic and transparent, these new advisory bodies also aim to bring together non-governmental agents from civil society, academics and diverse sectors of the government. Therefore, the UPM and INM acquired a new role of centralising and coordinating efforts across all the areas relevant to integration policies (Bobes-León and Pardo-Montaño 2017).

Due to the election and consequent change of Mexican government in 2012, there was seen as an opportunity and a need to create a new *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* (PND - National Plan for Development⁸⁴). As part of its participatory methodology, civil society was invited to collaborate in the consultation process to draft the policy. Taking this opportunity, migrants' rights activists (including returnees themselves) developed and presented an integrated diagnosis of migrants' diverse post-return challenges and needs, as well as a set of proposed actions to be implemented. As a result of this initiative, return migrants were included as a priority group in the PND (see PND 2013-2018 Goal 5, Objective 5.4.⁸⁵) to be implemented during the current administration. While the incorporation of the voices of return migrants in the PND was considered by some of my research participants as great

⁸⁴ The PND is the instrument which establishes the country's objectives and priorities in relation to all sectors in response to the national needs. The PND promotes a multi-level and multi-sectorial implementation of government's actions. Therefore, Mexico City and the 31 states as well as the various municipalities develop their own plans for development based on the federal one. Additionally, the different ministries and institutions (e.g. National Commission for Human Rights) develop their own plans called sectorial plans.

⁸⁵ Goal 5. Mexico with Global Responsibility. Objective 5.4. Ensure the interests of Mexicans abroad and protect the rights of foreigners in the national territory. Strategy 5.4.2. Create mechanisms for the reintegration of return migrants and strengthen repatriation programmes. Lines of action: 1. Review the repatriation agreements, to ensure that migrants' rights and protocols are respected. 2. Improve the current repatriation programmes to safeguard the physical and emotional integrity of Mexican returnees and to protect them from human rights violations. 3. Establish control mechanisms that allow the identification and controlled repatriation of those returnees with a criminal background. 4. Create and strengthen skills' certification processes and reinsertion programmes for migrants returning to their communities of origin.

progress in the national public policy, several interviewees expressed concern that three out of four actions incorporated in the final document were related to “improving repatriation systems.” In other words, three out of four governmental actions towards returnees were focused on monitoring the return flow of deportees (which could be easily related to national security issues) rather than focusing on their (re)integration needs and wellbeing. This contradicts Enrique Peña Nieto’s excerpt of the discourse (and that of government officers interviewed for this research) introduced in the beginning of this chapter.

The active participation of the civil society during the development of the PND and the receptiveness of the newly created UPM, led to the construction of the first ever *Programa Especial de Migración* (PEM - Special Migration Programme) in 2014. This ambitious development of Mexican public policy was well received nationally and internationally for its progressive approach based on principles such as human rights, human security and sustainable development; for incorporating a gender and inter-cultural perspective; and for having a multilevel governance approach whereby policy implementation is coordinated vertically between levels of government and horizontally across governmental agencies and non-governmental actors (*Programa Especial de Migración* 2014-2018). On reading this document one can understand that, at least according to the discourse, the Mexican government is adopting a change of paradigm from one based on national security (migration management) to human security and human rights (migration governance). In its introduction, the PEM states that its main aim is to contribute to improving migrants’ (including emigrants, immigrants, refugees, returnees and transit migrants) wellbeing through promoting their full access to their rights and by doing this, consolidate their role as development agents. In its specific analysis with regard to returnees, the policy document acknowledges the current limitations that they face (difficulty in accessing employment and services, as well as various obstacles to certify their studies and job experiences in the USA) and contends that if they were better supported, returnees could contribute to their communities. The PEM sets out five main objectives⁸⁶, and while there are various aspects of each objective that would ultimately have a positive impact on returnees’ wellbeing,

⁸⁶ Objective 1. To promote a culture of legality, human rights and migration appreciation. Objective 2. Incorporate the migration issue into regional and local development strategies. Objective 3. To consolidate an effective migration management system based on the principles of assistance, international co-responsibility, border security and human security. Objective 4. To favour the processes of integration and reintegration of migrants and their families. Objective 5. Strengthen access to justice and security for migrants, their families and those who defend their rights.

objective number four is specifically devoted to their (re)integration. Within this objective there are six strategies covering the need for differentiated and specialised support to (re)integrate into social, cultural, and political spheres, as well as highlighting the need to ensure access to employment and (education and health) services. Unfortunately, several participants in my own research stated that the implementation of this public policy has proved to be unrealistic and highly problematic. The following quote is an excerpt from an interview with a key informant and illustrates some of the problems faced during the implementation of the PEM. While this participant summarises them very clearly, these aspects resonated among many other interviewees, mainly but not exclusively from civil society:

The only way one can measure the government's political will [to support returnees] is in *pesos* [money]... The PEM did not get any funds for its implementation, therefore I can say that there is no real interest from the government in its implementation [...] I would say that the main problem is in its nature, if we were talking here of a sectorial programme and not a *special* programme, things would be different. A sectorial programme like the National Human Rights Programme or the National Programme Against Discrimination has a binding character and therefore an allocated budget. No ministry, actually, no one has any obligation towards a *special* programme like this [PEM]. All that the UPM can do is go and ask the various institutions to please cooperate and consider incorporating migrants to their already full agendas and empty pockets. So, as the PEM is a *special* programme, it is not binding, it does not have its own budget and its own programmes, therefore it has become just a reference document for civil society to negotiate with the government; and the perfect smokescreen for them [government] to say they are making progress to improve the living conditions of migrants in Mexico.

As the key informant highlights, the PEM, due to its nature as a special programme, lacks funding and therefore it has been difficult to implement. Furthermore, some critical voices argue that the rights of returnees have not been a priority within the agendas of migrants' rights advocates. And the little progress achieved in the promotion of the right to identity and right to education has been limited to more recent and specific efforts from a couple of civil society organisations.

From the governmental sector one of the few initiatives supporting returnees is the *estategia Somos Mexicanos* (We are Mexicans strategy), launched in 2017, which replaces the PRIM previously mentioned. Despite the goal of this programme to strengthen the cultural, economic and social (re)integration of Mexicans repatriated to the country, so far it seems that it still operates more as a reception programme for some deportees rather than

a (re)integration programme for return migrants (*Somos Mexicanos* 2017). Regarding the institutions responsible for this programme, this service is still provided by immigration authorities in collaboration with ministries such as health and labour, as well as some non-governmental actors such as the IOM. While the multi-agency approach was well received by some key informants, they did not consider the INM as the best institution for implementation due to the nature of its work, namely controlling immigration flows.

In terms of (re)integration policies at a local level, as Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas assert, often these have been developed either in the shadow of national policies or independently in the absence of a national policy (2016:193). The latter is illustrated in Mexico City where the *Ley de interculturalidad, atención a migrantes y movilidad humana* (Law of interculturality, assistance to migrants and human mobility) was published in April 2011, prior to the introduction of national migration law. Furthermore, efforts to address migrants' needs in the local public policy have led to their incorporation in Mexico City's development programme as a priority group, with particular inclusion in health and education objectives (*Programa General de Desarrollo del Distrito Federal 2013-2018*). While the FAM was launched in 2009, the *Ley de interculturalidad* represents the first public policy that acknowledges the existence of return migrants as a significant segment of the population and addresses their (re)integration needs in a more comprehensive way. An extremely significant aspect of this law is that it grants migrants a 'guest' status which allows them access to social programmes and services regardless of the documentation that they possess. Moreover, beyond migrants' entitlement this policy highlights the key role that authorities have in ensuring migrants' equal access to their rights (*Ley de interculturalidad, atención a migrantes y movilidad humana* 2011, Articles 32 and 35). Under this legislation, an agency was created to assume responsibility of the delivery of services for migrants (*Dirección de atención a huéspedes, migrantes y sus familias* - DAHMF), including returnees, and it was incorporated into the activities of the *Secretaría de desarrollo rural y equidad para las comunidades* (SEDEREC - Secretary of rural development and equity for communities).

Contrary to the case of the PEM, SEDEREC was entitled to propose a sectorial plan (rather than a special plan) and has therefore developed the mechanisms (budget and regulations) to implement different services. Consequently, SEDEREC has incorporated the

integration of migrants, including returnees, into its sectorial plan⁸⁷. As mentioned previously, the objective of the SEDEREC is to identify migrants' needs and refer migrants to the various agencies that they require services from. Additionally, this office provides advice on how to obtain the documentation required to restart their lives in Mexico, but more importantly it functions as a reference point for returnees.

In terms of public policy, the experience of Puebla contrasts markedly with that of Mexico City. While there have been some proposals put forward during the last 10 years, Puebla does not yet have a migration law. With regard to its development plan, the only consideration for migrants is in its second clause, "equal opportunities for all." In its efforts to reduce the inequality gap, the government is proposing supporting migrants' families who receive remittances to participate in savings schemes and business investments (*Plan Estatal de Desarrollo del Estado Puebla 2011-2017*). Moreover, in Huaquechula's development plan there is no incorporation of the migrant population whatsoever. About its programming, the *Coordinación Estatal de Asuntos Intercionales y de Apoyo a Migrantes* (CEAIAM - Coordination of international affairs and migrants' assistance⁸⁸) was created in 2011 with the main objective of supporting Mexican emigrants in the USA and the development of their communities, among others. Under the umbrella of this organisation a specific programme (DIRMP - *Desarrollo Integral y Reinserción de Migrantes Poblanos*) was developed to support return migrants and their families. According to key officials, this programme does not have an allocated budget and its main objective is to coordinate service provision to help return migrants (re)integrate in their communities. More about the actual implementation or practices derived from the current public policy for return migrants' (re)integration will be analysed later in this chapter.

6.2. (Re)integration, socio-economic aspects, access to institutions and structural constraints

We cannot talk about the [reintegration] situation of returnees' without talking about the structural problems that we all face in Mexico [...] Peña Nieto's government has a very neoliberal approach, I might sound radical but I just do not see any political

⁸⁷ Strategic goal 2. To facilitate the development and social integration of migrants by facilitating their access to self-employment (objective 3 goal 1) and promoting a positive attitude towards migrants among Mexico City residents (objective 4 goal 1).

⁸⁸ In december 2017, this unit was replaced by the Instituto Poblano de Asistencia al Migrante (IPAM – Puebla Instituto for Migrant's Assistance). This new institute has its own budget and funds for its operation but also to support the creation of new programming for returnees.

will [from the government] to build a strong and stable society... When you review the *Plan Nacional* [National plan for development] you realise it is all focused on foreign investment, oil exploitation and privatisation of the national institutions through the *Reformas Estructurales* [structural reforms].

When discussing with my interviewees, such as the one above, the contextual aspects that influence returnees' ability to (re)integrate, the three most common areas mentioned were the (i) economic opportunities upon return; (ii) government (institutional) support; and (iii) sociocultural environment in the places of return. As was highlighted in the excerpt above, many of the challenges raised by participants are part of the structural problems that everyone living in Mexico experiences. Therefore in this section of the chapter I will analyse how these contextual aspects intersect with return migrants' realities.

Mexico is a medium-income country which, despite its relatively high score and ranking (77/188) on the human development index (UNDP 2015⁸⁹), has a population that is affected by persistent levels of poverty⁹⁰ and income inequality⁹¹. Furthermore, the economic models implemented in Mexico, namely import substitution industrialisation (1940–1980) and neoliberalism (1982 to the present), have not only created inequalities among different sectors of the society, but have also increased inequality between Mexican states thereby allowing social and economic wellbeing to be concentrated in a few localities (e.g. mainly urban developments like Mexico City), and leaving many of the rest (e.g. mainly rural localities like those of the state of Puebla) in a greater position of vulnerability (Giménez et al. 2016:48). Therefore, returning migrants are not only confronted with the evident income differences between the USA and Mexico, but also with the varying levels of development and opportunities within the country, which directly influence their (re)integration experience. As pointed out by several participants, these development discrepancies include the creation and implementation of policies and programming: in other words, government (institutional) support. Regarding the policies and services available for migrants, a key informant from a local NGO in Mexico City stated,

⁸⁹ The Human Development Index is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living (UNDP 2015).

⁹⁰ In 2010, nearly half of Mexican people were living in poverty (52 million), of which nearly one-quarter were living in extreme poverty (12.8 million) (CONEVAL 2010:25).

⁹¹ According to the study 'In it together: Why less inequality benefits all?' Mexico was ranked the second most unequal country of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2015).

In the last couple of months I have realised that we cannot say that “there is nothing” [referring to available services] because it minimises what we *do* have in place, and this might be the reason why people think there is nothing available for migrants [...] there is the *Programa Especial de Migración* [PEM] and the *Oficinas de Atención al Migrante* (local offices for migrants’ support) [...] The problem is that although there is a structure and programming in place, even people from the same government do not know what is out there. The other day (names government official) approached us [the NGO] saying that they want to start providing shelter and food for migrants. I was shocked! She did not know that there are things already in place [...] There is lack coordination within government [...] and it also shows how people [government officials] are focused in providing emergency assistance rather than ensuring migrants’ long-term access to rights.

While this key informant, like some others, acknowledges the existence of a policy framework and certain infrastructure in place which supports some returnees upon arrival (introduced earlier in this chapter), they also highlight the fact that implementation is problematic due to lack of information, coordination and adequacy of services. Let us take as an example what is happening within the education sphere. A recent, important policy change mentioned by several participants was the simplification of the procedures to revalidate studies and to certify work experience gained in another country. While this constitutes positive progress at a federal level which potentially could benefit a great number of young returnees in need of access to basic education or certifying their studies, the actual implementation of the policy change at a local level remains problematic. Several participants highlighted that, in order to ensure the adequate implementation of this policy change, there was still a lot of work to do, for example the actual modification of the law⁹², communication of the policy change through an awareness campaign amongst service providers, as well as the establishment of coordination mechanisms between authorities to ensure effective coordination within the different levels of government. All this, with very limited funds. Therefore, participants were concerned about the delays in the implementation of a policy which is crucial for returnees’ (re)integration. In the words of a key informant, “[...] it took us years (around four!) to change the policy and it will take many more to see its implementation at a local level.”

In addition to the difficulties of trying to achieve an effective multi-level governance, research conducted with returned migrants in a traditional state of migration (Zacatecas)

⁹² In April 2017 (almost two years after conducting my fieldwork) the Mexican senate approved the proposal of the Presidency to modify the General Education Law in its articles 2, 12, 14, 32, 33, 56 and 63, and 4 more articles were added (*Secretaría de Educación Pública* 2017).

highlights an additional layer of resistance to the provision of adequate education services for returnees (Hamann and Zúñiga 2011). Hamann and Zúñiga concluded that migrant students were given the same treatment as any other non-migrant student. In other words, there were no special considerations made as a result of language barriers, bi-cultural background or gaps in their knowledge. Furthermore, the study highlights that school administrators often held negative attitudes towards USA-schooled children and, when faced with situations where education regulations were open to interpretation, decisions were often taken that disadvantaged these students due to these negative attitudes. This finding correlates with several of my interviewees' complaints related to lack of government (institutional) support. In short, while some changes have been made to facilitate returnees' full access to their rights, at the local level migrants' exclusion is not grounded in migrants' documented status, as in the USA, but rather in other indirect or informal barriers such as inadequate services and negative attitudes. More on this was discussed by another interviewee,

During the last few years, there has been an acknowledgment that there is a return flow on a large scale but it is still largely overlooked that this population has changed. There is the need to adjust services to be able to meet returnees' needs [...] Additionally, as a return migrant myself, I realise that there is great resistance towards us as a bi-national population. People do not understand how one person can be from two places; they think 'how can you be American and Mexican at the same time?' People mistrust us, there is always this need to prove how Mexican we are. [...]

As this key informant highlights, some of the attitudes that underpin the unwelcoming behaviour of the non-migrant population in Mexico are linked to an assumption that its society is and must remain homogenous and nationalistic. Despite an acknowledgment of Mexican sociocultural diversity, the use of metaphors such as 'cultural mosaic' or a 'symbiosis of cultures' are commonly used to describe the country's long-established national identity, rather than as analyses of its changing sociocultural composition (Acosta-García and Martínez-Ortíz 2014:638). Mexico is the third most populous country on the American continent (after the USA and Brazil), having a population of approximately 119 million people. In terms of ethnic diversity, while the majority of the Mexican population still identify themselves as *mestizos*⁹³, increasing numbers of people (1.4 million) are identifying

⁹³ A *mestizo* is considered a person of mixed ethnic background, in the Mexican case Spanish and indigenous. One of the main critics of this term is that the hybrid character behind *mestizaje* offered

themselves as afro-descendent and (7.3 million) as indigenous (INEGI 2010, 2015). Additionally, Mexico as a country of emigration, immigration, transit, and return, hosts a significant number of migrants with diverse cultural backgrounds that equally impact the sociocultural composition of the country.

Having said this, there has so far been a lack of an academic approach to consider the implications of the intermingling that takes place among the many groups recognised as constitutive of Mexico's population, including return migrants (Acosta-García and Martínez-Ortíz 2014:638). Gall has pointed out that widespread social frictions in Mexico take place in the form of racism and other types of negative discrimination, such as classism, mainly against indigenous people and those living in poverty, and she highlights that the majority of relations amongst the Mexican population inherit power configurations from Mexico's colonial past (2004). Therefore, while ideas of ethnicity and social class continue to play a crucial role in people's levels of wellbeing in Mexico, an overemphasis on ethnicity in studies of diversity within the country has obscured a more recent multi-layered process of diversification brought by other social dynamics such as migration (Acosta-García and Martínez-Ortíz 2014:2).

The arrival of new groups adds another dimension to the challenges posed by an already-existing diversity in Mexico. From a migration standpoint, the construction of the Mexican national identity is characterised by the incorporation of a conflictual coexistence of sympathy and rejection of the 'different' or the 'other'. Power configurations from Mexico's colonial past have also influenced the relations established with its migrants. For example, the resistance to the 'undesirable' immigrants (e.g. indigenous refugees from Guatemala) has always coexisted with the acceptance of the 'desirable' ones (e.g. white, highly educated refugees from South America) (Bobes-León and Pardo-Montano 2017:19). Specifically, regarding return migrants, this ethnic controversy intersects with another significant aspect of Mexican society, the conflicting pro- and anti-American sentiments. Mexicans' ambiguous feelings towards the USA oscillate between admiration and contempt, and between trust and mistrust. According to Tickner and colleagues' research on Mexicans' perception of the USA, on one hand, Mexicans have a favourable opinion of the USA due to the (mainly material) gains that the country obtains through a relationship with it (e.g. financial investment, development and security aid, and remittances). On the other, there is a pervasive feeling

an idealised homogeneous identity to Mexicans, hiding the country's already-existing diversity and neutralising claims of excluded groups such as 'pure' indigenous, afro-descendants or immigrants.

of rejection and mistrust due to the USA's history of interventionism in Latin America⁹⁴ (Tickner et al. 2015). These anti-American feelings have exponentially increased, and a new wave of nationalism is rising in the country due to the current USA administration's foreign policy on Mexico (e.g. the well-known threat of building a wall to stop immigration, the worsening of the deportation measures, the racist and xenophobic language used against Mexican migrants, among others).

Within this frame of nationalistic thinking, return migrants are seen as both victims and a threat to Mexican society. Particularly those returning with a hyphenated identity are seen as suspicious and problematic, and often considered as 'disloyal' to the nation. On a more personal level, Mexicans' sympathy or even admiration for the 'American way of life' also coexists with its rejection. In other words, the admiration of the USA due to a perception that it represents the height of modernity and the 'land of opportunities' where upward mobility is possible for anyone, coexists with the rejection of its 'liberal' set of values which leads to the use of drugs, gang affiliation and overall disrespect of family values and traditions. Often, these misguided generalisations evolve as polarised and antagonistic sentiments towards return migrants, through labelling them as good or bad, as desirable or undesirable, or as welcome or unwelcome.

These constructions of belongingness and deservingness intersect with the notion of the 'limited good'. In a general sense, 'limited good' is the notion developed in different societies that considers that access to available resources – including services – are held to be finite. In other words, it is believed that, for every person who has access to material resources or services, another will be left out (Watters 2008). In a context like the Mexican one, where the inefficient and insufficient provision of social protection and services is the norm, the 'limited good' results in an exclusionary system which promotes discrimination of the 'other'. In this case, as in many other countries, migrants – including returnees – are affected. In the words of a key informant, "I would say that the integration experience of a returnee is comparable to the one of any Central American migrant coming to Mexico". This translates into the development of informal mechanisms (highlighted by Hamann and Zúñiga 2011) that establish who, beyond their entitlement, deserves access to these services.

In order to enhance our understanding of how these contextual aspects (economic opportunities upon return; access to government (institutional) support, and sociocultural

⁹⁴ This anti-American feeling is summarised in the historic quote of the Mexican ex-president Porfirio Díaz, "Poor Mexico, so far from God, and so close to the United States."

environment) affect return migrants' (re)integration experience, in the following sections I will elaborate on how they affect returnees within the local contexts of Huaquechula and Mexico City.

6.3. The case of Huaquechula

Participants described the local economy in Huaquechula as stagnant. Three main explanations given for this were the scarcity of (natural) resources (access to water was highlighted as the most significant), lack of adequate conditions for business development, and lack of access to employment. Specifically, the decrease of access to irrigation water for agriculture has deeply affected certain actors and locations within the region, and was identified by participants as a key factor contributing to local inequalities. Due to their geographical location, at the south of the municipality and far from the main rivers, Huaquechula and Bonilla⁹⁵ are considered some of the most badly affected towns (Cordero Díaz 2004:119). Among the most disadvantaged groups are small farmers whose economy relies on small-scale agriculture. This is the case of Paco (H, 37) and his family who depend on their agricultural production to be able to sell in the local markets, trade with other producers, as well as use it for their small family food business, and for their household consumption. For this family, the dry season means not just losing their production which is their main means of livelihood, but also losing the financial investment that they made during the sowing.

With regard to business development, contrary to the case of remittances which are often used for household consumption and construction, return migrants' savings seem to represent a good capital injection into the locality due to its investment in the development of businesses. As will be revealed in more detail in the next chapter, these businesses rarely grow as planned and are extremely vulnerable to any contextual shock or personal eventuality. For example, David (H, 31) upon his return invested his savings in the purchase of a van to work in the local public transportation system, and after just one year of work, it was stolen. Despite filing a police report, David did not receive a response from the police with regard to the resolution of the investigation. About this, he said "By losing my van I not only lost my main means with which to provide for my family, I also felt that someone had

⁹⁵ While the supply of water apparently is the same, the development of the population has increased its demand resulting in a decline in the agricultural production since the 1970s which has triggered an increase in migration to the USA.

stolen my years of hard work in the USA [...] I did not follow up with it [police report]. I don't think I would get any response from them [authorities], it would be a total waste of time". At the time of the interview, David was trying to recover from his financial loss by starting a new business; a hamburger stall on the porch of his house. David's experience highlights that systemic failures at a macro level, such as delinquency and lack of an effective judicial system, contribute to the perception that there are inadequate conditions for business development in Huaquechula. These aspects, beyond reducing migrants' opportunities to have a sustainable return, also reduce their trust in institutions.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of employment opportunities was considered by several participants as a consequence of the stagnant economy in Huaquechula. Andres (H, 39), mentioned – quite frustrated – that the (few) developments happening in the town were because of the investments migrants had made, and highlighted that the government had taken very few steps towards the creation and support of initiatives that could generate employment for Huaquechula's residents. While some initiatives were mentioned (e.g. pig farm, tea factory and to make the town a *Pueblo Mágico*⁹⁶) these had not developed into anything concrete. As for small-scale businesses developed by the majority of returnees, these were primarily run by families, leaving very few employment options for other people. A more detailed description of the economic activities of returnees in Huaquechula will be given in the next chapter; the only feature to highlight at this point is that, interestingly, one of the very few sources of formal employment available for returnees was within the local government.

In relation to how the PEM is implemented locally, significant governmental authorities at a state and municipal level identified as the main problem the absence of budget allocation for the creation of programming and services. Additionally, political rivalries within the three levels of government, and political patronage, were two other obstacles identified for the implementation of these policies. In this regard, a key informant elaborated,

About this issue [how PEM is being implemented at the local level], it is very important to talk about how politics work these days. Despite that there are policies that have been approved at the federal level, when we apply for the funds to implement the programmes over here, they [federal government] tell us that there is no money available. It just happened to me: the President presented the

⁹⁶ 'Magic towns' is an initiative led by Mexico's Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR), in conjunction with other federal and state agencies, to attract tourists to other areas that are not the well-known resorts. To obtain the *pueblo mágico* certification, the local government has to apply for it and present the locality's uniqueness and historical relevance as well as confirm that has the infrastructure to receive tourists.

programme *México seguro contra desastres*⁹⁷ (Mexico safe against disasters), so I requested some funds for a contingency plan in case the volcano erupts, and they told me that there is no money for it. It is always like that, they make a big deal about the new policies but when the time comes to implement, they say there is no money. Especially if you are not from PRI⁹⁸, they first ‘look after’ their people [localities ruled by PRI] and then it is us [localities ruled by other parties]. It happens the same for the case of migration, I have a person here in charge of the *Oficina de atención al migrante* (Office for migrants’ affairs), but there is no money to pay for his salary or to implement any programming. Same thing with the person in charge of the Municipal Women’s Institute. We do get some funds and training from the state [ruled by the same political party – PAN⁹⁹] but not from the Federal government [ruled by the opposition – PRI].

Regarding programmes and institutions created specifically for migrants, approximately half of the returnees living in Huaquechula had knowledge of at least one, but very few had access to them and even fewer received services related during their (re)integration process. In terms of these programmes, the majority of participants mentioned the (well known) *Programa Paisano*¹⁰⁰ and the less well-known PRIM. Regarding *Programa Paisano*, Tere (H, 48) who struggled to enter the country without being robbed by border authorities (her experience was mentioned in the last chapter), described it as “good in intention, but not very effective in practice.” Two main obstacles identified for its effective delivery are the culture of corruption and impunity engrained in the governmental institutions, and the lack of interest and trust of migrants to report any incident. PRIM was described as helpful for some participants who were deported, as they received assistance after their arrival on Mexican soil. For example, Tony (H, 37) was referred to a shelter so he could spend his first couple of nights in Mexico safely. As for institutions, the one mentioned was the local *Oficina de Atención al Migrante* (Office for migrants’ affairs) which had provided some support for people in need of repatriating the bodies of relatives who were deceased while in the USA and for people in need of obtaining Mexican documentation for their US-born children to be

⁹⁷ In 2013 the President announced a new programme *México seguro ante desastres* (Mexico safe against natural disasters) whose aim is to prevent natural disasters but also to respond and especially protect the population in case of emergencies.

⁹⁸ The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI – Institutional Revolutionary Party) is the governing party at a Federal level.

⁹⁹ *Partido de Acción Nacional* – PAN (National Action Party).

¹⁰⁰ Established in 1989 with the main objective of controlling and gradually eliminating common abuses and crimes committed against Mexicans during their visit home, such as extortion, robbery and corruption through delivering information about migrants’ rights and obligations, protecting the security of migrants and their property, training and raising awareness among public servants and civil society about migrants’ rights and responding to complaints and allegations done by migrants (INM 2016a).

included in the education system. This office, while limited in its scope of services, was described as helpful. Interestingly, according to state-level officials, other types of (re)integration assistance such as USA labour certification, job-seeking and jobseekers' allowance were available to support returnees' economic (re)integration, but no one mentioned them or had received them among the interviewees from Huaquechula.

Access to programmes and institutions in vital areas for (re)integration such as education, health care, and welfare, was also described as positive, especially the health and education services to which the vast majority had access (either themselves or an immediate family member). Despite their access, what remains a challenge is the inadequacy of the services, particularly when compared to those they had access to while in the USA. As an example, while the majority of participants were enrolled in *Seguro Popular*¹⁰¹, many opted for private services. Long administrative procedures and waiting periods, lack of basic material resources (e.g. medicines) and adequate installations, as well as negative attitudes from service providers were some of the reasons why interviewees decide to pay for private care instead of making use of this service. With regard to education, contrary to Hamann and Zúñiga's findings in the state of Zacatecas (2011), in Huaquechula access to basic education was not identified as an obstacle by participants. This was confirmed by key informants from local schools, "we received instructions from the upper management [education authorities from the state capital], they asked us to ensure the access to all students [to basic education] regardless of their available documentation." Knowing of experiences like this, where for certain institutions the principle *pro persona* [the person first] is more relevant than the bureaucratic requirements, gives some hope that the local implementation of the recent changes in the education policy (mentioned earlier in this chapter) may not be as problematic as expected by some key informants.

Experiences of accessing welfare services contrasted markedly with health and education services, where enrolment to *Prospera*¹⁰² was identified as problematic. While the obstacles remain unclear, two of the most common understandings shared by participants were that when they were compared to the non-migrant population they were no longer

¹⁰¹ Since 2004, *Seguro Popular* is a public health insurance that covers a wide range of services without payment for its affiliates. It was established by the Federal Government in an effort to expand health care to those without health insurance and to reduce health inequities.

¹⁰² Launched in 1997, *Prospera* (previously *Oportunidades*) is a conditional cash transfer programme targeting poor and extremely poor households which integrates three basic social rights – health, education and nutrition.

considered as poor or extremely poor, therefore they did not qualify as recipients of this social programme. Very often, participants would make reference to the fact that their new housing situation would serve to raise their status within the community, therefore they would not be considered as 'in need' giving them limited access to resources. The other understanding was that access to this programme was not fair and transparent. In other words, David (H, 31), who is the father of four children, was self-employed and earning less than the minimum wage and had no access to *Prospera*, identified access to this programme as something more related to connections (who you know within the government) than with their entitlement or need.

When life became challenging during his post-return experience, David found comfort and support in the Evangelical church, including financial support "when we [him and his family] had nothing to eat." Similar to David and his family, some other returnees identified civil society (mainly religious organisations) as a significant source of functional support, such as participation in saving schemes and receiving advice regarding business development and career paths. Furthermore, they were able to find psychosocial support; after all, as Ramiro (H, 55) mentioned, "when we arrive, we are unstable, we need support that non-migrants do not require." Although very few had access to these non-governmental services, participants reported that these were important spaces where they felt listened to, were provided with valuable information and were able to re-connect with other migrants¹⁰³.

In relation to the social environment affecting migrants' (re)integration in Huaquechula, while some participants expressed (particularly during the focus groups) their concerns regarding returnees' involvement in gang violence and criminality, overall it prevailed the impression that this is an inaccurate perception and that Huaquechula is a tranquil and traditional community. For some participants, these aspects had a positive connotation and for others (the minority) a negative one. On the one hand, as mentioned in the last chapter, due to the fact that the majority of interviewees had an undocumented status and were based in New York while in the USA, there was an expectation of returning to a calm, quiet and traditional environment where people could feel safe, free and relaxed. On the other, some people, such as Paco (H, 37) missed what a big city like New York had to offer "[...] being able to enjoy myself, go to the zoo, a baseball game, the concerts, the *bailes* [...] and to find well paid jobs." Furthermore, the conflictual coexistence of sympathy and rejection of

¹⁰³ Particularly a couple of men who were not coping well with their return and who were drinking alcohol heavily, were supported and were able to better handle their addiction.

the 'different' or the 'other' (described earlier in this chapter), had led to the development of categories such as 'desirable' and 'undesirable' returnees (mentioned in Chapter 5). The desirable returnees would be those *sin vicios* (with no vices – healthy), who have fulfilled their family/community responsibilities (wealthy), and who respect traditions and behave accordingly. The undesirable returnees would be those not fulfilling these expectations. Particularly those identified as being deported would easily be labelled as “*bad hombres*” [bad men] and be blamed for gangs and violent activities. Another relevant aspect related to the social environment was that the strong sense of community and cohesion longed for by participants contrasted with the reality of political divisions, as well as issues of mistrust between migrants, non-migrants and authorities.

6.4. The case of Mexico City

In comparison with the context in Huaquechula, participants unsurprisingly described Mexico City's economy as more dynamic. However, interestingly, this dynamism did not always translate into a better financial situation or wellbeing for participants. Return migrants reported facing various barriers to earning their living. Overall, access to jobs, particularly to well-paid jobs, was identified as challenging. The reason behind this was that Mexico City's overpopulation results in a high labour supply and consequently a much more exclusive job market. In the simple words of Lulú (MC, 23), who came back to be reunified with her mother who was deported,

This place [Mexico City] is tricky, one thinks 'this is one of the biggest cities in the world, there will be many jobs out there...' and yes there are, but because it is pretty packed the salaries go down. In the end, they [employers] know if you do not take it [the job], they will find someone else. So, to find a well-paid job is very hard, you need very good qualifications [...] My mom got one [a job] because of her networks; if it had not been for that, I am not sure she could have managed [to get a job]. When you do not have [education] certificates, it [being able to find a job] depends more on who you know, and your luck.

As Lulú highlights, participants often identified the inability to fulfil the education requirements, but also age, physical appearance, place of origin and gender were

mentioned as reasons for being excluded from employment¹⁰⁴. This exclusion is not experienced by returnees as part of the typical inequalities faced by Mexicans; a return migrant will always compare these experiences with those from the USA and therefore often become aggravated. For example, Rebeca (H, 33) mentioned, “To find a job here [in Mexico] is hard. There [the USA] you are undocumented, do not speak the language, you have no education or experience, and still you have better chances to develop. It all depends on your willingness to work. Here there is a lot of discrimination for not having studies, for being a woman, for your age, for coming from a town or a small village.”

For those who did not possess a university degree but a good command of the English language, the booming call centre industry is ready to recruit them regardless of their age or physical appearance, offering them a salary similar to that of a non-migrant with a graduate diploma. This is an interesting situation where the private sector has capitalised on the skills and bicultural, bilingual heritage of returnees and offers an option for all those who would not fit into the image and requirements that a conservative business world such as the Mexican one imposes (Anderson 2015). Furthermore, a small number of participants, like Carlos (MC, 35), Luis (MC, 32) and Nadia (MC, 35), who completed their graduate and post-graduate education abroad, were able to access what they considered to be well-paid jobs. Due to the exclusionary employment system and/or due to the nature of their return (and their limited ability to prepare for it), people in Mexico City were less able to develop businesses, and therefore many were self-employed providing informal services. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

Regarding access to government (institutional) support, the main obstacles identified by key informants to the implementation of the PEM in this site were limited funds and changes in the responsible authorities of SEDEREC which had led to a high staff turnover and disruption of services. Beyond that, the change in the organisation’s management had brought changes in the vision and understanding of their work, as well as a less pro-active role in the policy making arena. Regarding other programmes and institutions created specifically for migrants, less than half of the returnees interviewed had knowledge of at least one service, but in comparison with Huaquechula, almost all participants have had access to them. Within the programmes, very few participants mentioned *Pograma Paisano* and PRIM; the most mentioned was the local DAHMF (Office for migrants’ affairs).

¹⁰⁴ Particularly the discrimination due to gender and age was widely discussed in the focus group conducted in Mexico City.

Regarding the services provided directly by the DAHMF, these are focused on supporting functional needs such as access to documentation and development of new enterprises (self-employment). From what participants described, some of the limitations of the service delivery were, on the one hand, migrants' lack information of their existence; and on the other, the requirements and procedures to access the DAHMF programmes were identified as unclear and often problematic. As an example, the DAHMF provides individual and group grants for migrants who want to develop or improve a small enterprise. In order to obtain this grant, migrants (returnees and immigrants) are requested to present their project in a specific format and fulfil a very detailed list of requirements, including having arrived in the country within the last year and proof of their residence in the USA. Additionally, key informants highlighted that the funds available are significantly reduced. For 2015, the DAHMF allocated 75 grants to support small individual enterprises and 35 for group projects. This number also includes immigrants. According to a local NGO calculation, less than one percent of the return population in Mexico City has access to this particular fund.

Return migrants in Mexico City reported having better access to programmes and institutions in vital areas for (re)integration, in comparison with returnees living in Huaquechula. The reasons identified were diverse. Firstly, there is a wider range of services provided by the local government; secondly, more participants had access to employment, therefore they also had better access to social protection; and thirdly, SEDEREC's (re)integration policy stresses the importance of promoting migrants' equal access to city services. As a result, participants who had access to DAHMF report improved access to the wider network of service provision. Beyond *Seguro Popular* and access to basic education, some other services provided by the local government were the job-seeking allowance, the food and transportation subsidy for the senior population, and loans for house improvement; social protection schemes (ISSSTE¹⁰⁵ and IMSS¹⁰⁶) provided by employers and education institutions; and bursaries and scholarships for higher education provided by various education institutions. While the adequacy of services in this case is also problematic, in many cases participants mentioned that having access to them has had a positive impact on their wellbeing by helping them to make ends meet, overcome a crisis, improve their

¹⁰⁵ ISSSTE is the health and social services institution for the federal government employees.

¹⁰⁶ IMSS is the health and social services institution for employees of the private sector. It is also available for some students enrolled in higher education. It receives funding from federal government, workers and employers.

health or ensure sustainable access to education for their children. In the words of Eduardo (MC, 65):

These programmes have been useful, especially in terms of health. I have a hearing problem you know? It certainly has been a bit of a problem. You need to devote a lot of time, especially in the beginning you must run several errands – go here and there. But in the end the cost of the [hearing] device has been less than having bought it in a regular shop; I have paid around one-third of the regular price. If I haven't had this support I would not be able to be independent, most probably I would be sitting at home.

Some participants reported having received services from NGOs to help them to deal with more functional needs, such as applying for a grant from the DAHMF. While I was able to identify some traces of returnees' self-organisation and participation in different spaces where they were extremely vocal about their needs and the changes required to public policy, key informants said that these processes were facing great contextual and structural constraints,

Some of the [social] consequences of the migration movement are: uprooting, disorganisation, demobilisation, individualisation. Particularly this group [returnees] come from a very 'American' experience, an experience of individual development, of individual success [...] Also many come with a very critical view of Mexico and Mexicans and undoubtedly, from their hometowns. Additionally, they feel very pessimistic and negative about their future. If you add to all these aspects, the stress as consequence of their return process per se, they [returnees] become totally unwilling to get organised. It is a totally different story to other types of marginalisation and oppression where the answer is activation, in this case it is the opposite, the answer has been of deactivation and *that* is the big problem, returnees are very depoliticised, very disorganised. In our case, we started supporting a group of young people but it became a very complex process. The demand of the guys was very clear, "I did not come to get organised, I did not come to do politics, I want my certificate and to continue with my life" [...] The same happens with the other group, people organise themselves temporarily and then they disappear. People are hoping to return to the USA or are in the pursuit of survival, they are not in a position to organise themselves. In order to do this, they need full access to their rights, to have their basic needs covered [...] Particularly, in Mexico City, migrants are looking for information to get access to services and that's it. People do not stay with us for more than a couple of months.

When referring to the socio-cultural environment in Mexico City affecting migrants' (re)integration, people often highlighted its negative aspects, such as being chaotic, busy, insecure and exclusive. Some of the few social aspects described as positive were the lack of a cohesive environment and the familiarity for those returning from a big urban centre such as Los Angeles. With regard to the lack of cohesiveness provided by a massive city

like Mexico, many considered it to be helpful to preserve their anonymity as return migrants, especially deportees. Contrary to the case of people returning to Huaquechula where many felt exposed to social scrutiny, in Mexico City some people felt they had the opportunity to keep some of their experiences or, at least some of the details, to themselves. In the words of Hector (MC, 25):

Things in Mexico City can be easier, it is easier to go unnoticed over here, and when you have closer interactions you can opt to talk about your return or not, and if you do, you can pretty up the experience a little bit. Over there [mother's town] everyone knows when, why and how you came back so they point at you, "you went to the USA and came back empty handed? How dare you?!"

While Mexico City has made certain progress towards becoming a more inclusive city, for example the creation of some relevant policies and institutions to promote the (re)integration of returnees, there are mainstream dynamics within the society that returnees considered as discriminatory. In addition to the exclusion of adults of a certain age and people with basic education from the formal employment sector, return migrants also highlighted aspects such as feeling rejected for identifying themselves as bi-cultural or for their (Americanised) physical appearance. In the case of Mexico City, the conflictual relationship between returnees and non-migrants oscillates (as noted earlier) between admiration and contempt, and between trust and mistrust. In the words of Damián (MC, 23), while he has received comments such as "wow! You know lots of places, your life has been amazing!", he has also been criticised and bullied for being *pocho*¹⁰⁷. In his own words, "[...] when I express that I feel more American than Mexican not everyone understands it [...] some people judge me, they criticise me, they think I am being arrogant and a traitor". Additionally, other participants like Natalia (MC, 28) described her experience of what she called a "discriminatory judgement". In the following quote, she highlights how some negative perceptions of the physical appearance of return migrants may lead to prejudice, discrimination and even criminalisation by individuals, organisations, or institutions, and this may reduce their (re)integration opportunities. This is the case even if access is legally guaranteed, such as in domains such as housing, education, health care, and the labour market. From Natalia's experience we can conclude that, despite the change in policies to

¹⁰⁷ Some of my participants were often called *pocho* or *pocha* in their interactions with non-migrants back in Mexico. This term is often used in a derogatory way implying that a person is pretending to be an American, feels superior, and/or has lost his/her culture.

make Mexico City a more multi- and intercultural place at a policy level, the social environment that return migrants face is far from ideal,

Unfortunately, we [Mexicans] are very prejudiced and conservative. I know people who think, “oh my God! he has a tattoo, he must be a [drug] dealer or at least he uses drugs”, or “he has a [tattoo of a] tear over here [under the eye], he must have been in a gang and who knows, maybe he killed someone!” For many people returnees are terrible people just because they have a tattoo, they [non-migrants] exclude you... you become marginal. You come from being a minority in the USA to become a minority here too. It is the destiny of those who leave, you leave to become a minority forever.

6.5. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have explored how contextual aspects at a macro level, such as governmental policies and the socio-economic contexts (e.g. economic opportunities, access to institutional support and sociocultural environment in the places of return) deeply affect returnees' opportunities for (re)integration. While returnees' (re)integration process in Mexico, like any other integration process, is the result of the interaction between the migrant group and the receiving society, through this chapter it has become evident that in this case the contextual aspects of the receiving society – especially its governmental structure and socio-economic situation – present an extremely adverse scenario which poses significant structural constraints that are difficult to overcome by returnees, or any other migrant group.

Firstly, the historical analysis of how public policies developed revealed that progress in this area has happened mainly during very recent and highly politicised times. This has led to the creation of important gaps between political discourses (such as the eloquent discourse of Enrique Peña Nieto), policy frameworks, the actual policies and how they are implemented at the ground level. The conflictual relation between these arenas highlights how the Mexican government is trapped between its political commitments at national and international levels, and its real agenda and capacity to deliver adequate services for returnees. Participants highlighted that these gaps materialise through the existing tensions between what the national policies prescribe, and the absence of financial and other resources needed to implement them at a local level. Two positive aspects that have arisen through the recent development of diverse migration policies (e.g. National migration law, Law of interculturality, assistance to migrants and human mobility, PND) are the participation of diverse stakeholders in its development and implementation, and the creation of an integrated agenda representing real demands and needs of returnees. From this analysis we can conclude that there are also significant differences between the two field localities.

While Mexico City has developed its local migration law and institution, which has led to the ability to develop a sectorial plan (where returnees are incorporated) and get a (reduced) budget allocated, Huaquechula has not made any major steps to develop a system to support returnees' (re)integration. Therefore, a far more multilevel governance is needed in practice to improve migrants' real opportunities of (re)integration regardless of their place of return. In response to the new migration restrictions in the USA under the current administration, the Mexican government is making new strides towards improving the conditions in which the reception and (re)integration of deportees happen in Mexico. It will be necessary to do further research in this regard to learn more about how these efforts materialise into better opportunities for deportees and other returnees' (re)integration.

Secondly, the analysis of the contextual environment at a structural level helped us to have a more detailed account of how access (or lack thereof) to institutions affects returnees' experiences. Additionally, analysing the socio-economic and cultural accounts of participants' (re)integration helped us to better understand the environment into which returnees arrive. In the case of access to institutional support, it was observed that while participants, in a general sense, had access to governmental services, some of these have proved to be inadequate to their specific needs as returnees. Three main aspects to highlight in relation to their access to institutions are, firstly, that returnees in Huaquechula face obstacles to access key services (e.g. the conditional cash transfer programme *Prospera*) due to their new and presumed improved financial status. In Mexico City, due to its better policy framework, returnees can access a wider range of services which are very relevant for people in a vulnerable situation such as the elderly, single mothers or those with health concerns. A third aspect to highlight is the relevance of non-governmental organisations in meeting some of returnees' material needs, but particularly their psychosocial ones, which are largely overlooked in the governmental sector.

Another contextual aspect the returnees identified as key for their (re)integration was the available economic opportunities upon return. Unfortunately, returnees soon realise that the highly unequal economic system that forced them to migrate in the first place remains a major structural constrain upon their return. Other relevant structural constraints identified by participants are, for the rural site, its stagnant economy and lack of work opportunities. For the urban site, participants mentioned great inequalities and the exclusionary systems preventing them from accessing employment. This in turn pushed them to join the millions working in the informal sector. Some interviewees identified aspects that facilitated their

(re)integration process, such as their ability to invest in small scale-businesses (mainly in Huaquchula) and to transfer their skills (in the urban area).

As for the sociocultural environment in the places of return, in a general sense, participants felt that the more 'American' they behaved, the more obstacles they faced to be included as part of Mexican society. In the case of Huaquechula, as a traditional society, returnees described that they had to meet the requirements of coming back healthy, wealthy and 'well behaved'. As for the returnees from Mexico City, while a mega city like this would give them more room to escape social scrutiny, when trying to establish more intimate relationships they felt unwelcome and their socio-cultural differences made them feel ostracised. In general, we can say that while there have been significant improvements in the policy arena, the general social environment, including the empty promises, poor and inadequate public services, widespread unemployment and inequalities, and conservative society, still puts returnees in a similar position to any other immigrant and makes them feel that Mexico is an 'arid land' to fulfil their aspirations of a better life.

7. Experiences of (re)integration

It [(re)integration] depends on your own characteristics, on your attitude [...] To start with, over here [Mexico] you are on your own, you have to learn how to relate to others and this can turn complicated. In the States [USA] we are very individualistic, and here prevails a culture of 'sharing', you must learn and adapt to the new culture in order to develop better bonds with people [...] The motivations to return are key, thank God I am here because I decided, and that is why I came with an open mind. If I had been deported I would be like other people, feeling angry and looking for any possible way to go back... they [deportees] do not accept being here [...] The place [where you return to] influences too, if I had come back here [Mexico City] first, my feelings towards Mexico would be very different. I guess I could have felt lonely and detached. Arriving to a small town was nice, I felt welcomed, I met my family and they showed me around, they gave me so much food! My cousins took me to parties, I had a real good time. It also depends a lot on the job opportunities you find, if you are unable to get a job, instead of feeling adjusted you start hating the place and the overall system here [Mexico]. Getting a job definitely makes the difference, it gives you peace of mind, it boosts you.

Carlos (MC, 35) was born in a rural community in a traditional state of migration. His mother took him to the USA when he was only eight months old to reunite with his father, who was already settled in California. Five years later, he and his family returned to their 'hometown' in Mexico to *probar suerte* (try their luck). With their savings, Carlos' parents managed to settle down and purchase some cattle. After several years and a drought, their business was not going well and they decided to head back to California, where they live until today. Growing up, Carlos was interested in becoming a physician but, due to his undocumented status, he was unable to pursue this goal. After living in the USA for 21 years, and having obtained a bachelor's and a master's degree in bio-chemistry, he decided to return to Mexico (again) to enrol in university and finally be able to fulfil his dream of becoming a doctor. At the time of the interview, Carlos had been back in Mexico for four years. Upon his arrival, Carlos lived in his 'hometown', but after some time he re-located to Mexico City to be able to start his studies. Carlos' interview excerpt helps me to introduce this chapter as it touches on the aspects that he considered important for returnees' (re)integration, such as social networks, cultural orientation, access to livelihoods, motivations and places of return.

This final empirical chapter considers all of the aspects encompassed in the '(re)integration framework' proposed in Chapter 2 and summarised in Figure 2, which I reproduce again here in this chapter (see Figure 9). This framework is based on the study of the multiple dimensions of the (re)integration process (structural, social, cultural, civic and political). Additionally, within this framework two key aspects that may influence the

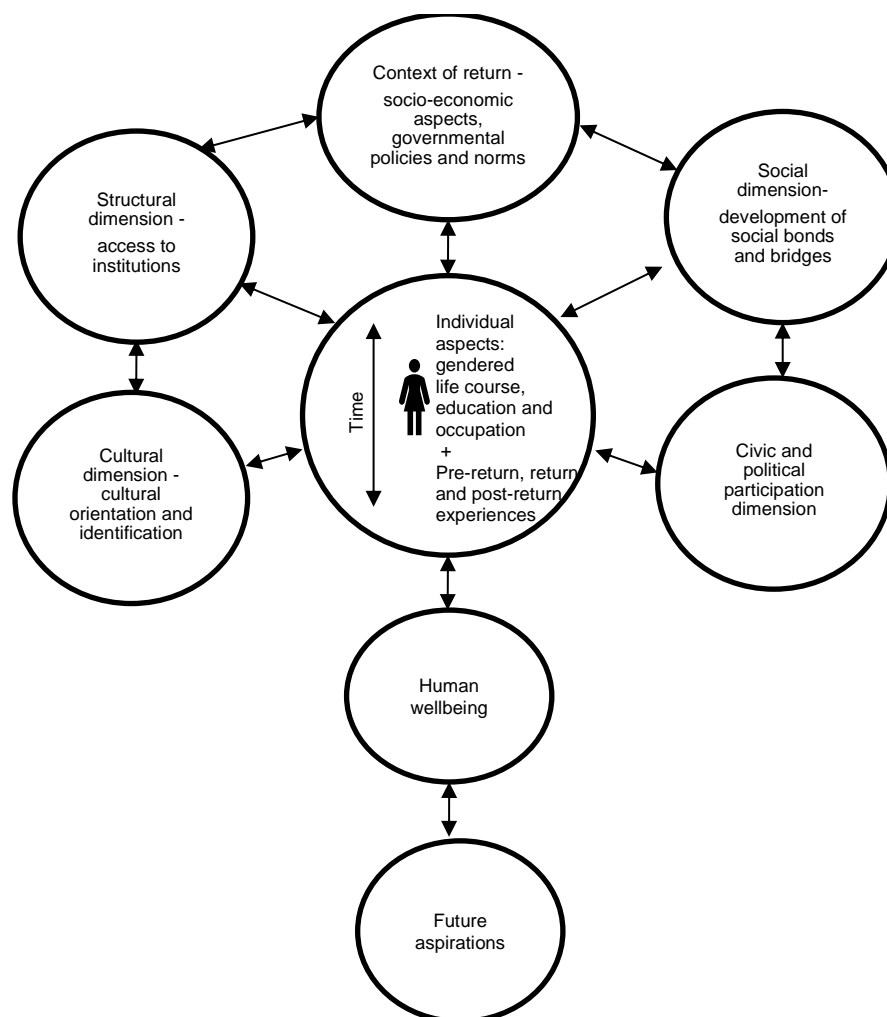
(re)integration process of returnees will be considered: (i) structural constraints, as well as returnees' gendered life course, education and occupation, and (ii) pre-return and return aspects (motivations and/or pressures to migrate and return, life in the host country, as well as the type and place of return). Based on Wright's (2012) work, I will be analysing returnees' human wellbeing and how these aspects influence returnees' future aspirations including intentions to re-migrate (see Figure 9). In setting out this framework for analysis, I draw on a variety of key papers on return migration and I aim to contribute to theory specification and contextualisation of the Mexican case (Cassarino 2004; Drotbohm 2012, 2015; Erdal and Ezzati 2015; Gmelch 1980; King 1986; King and Skeldon 2010; van Houte and Davids 2008; Vathi 2017; Wright 2012).

The chapter begins with an analysis of returnees' (re)integration processes within each dimension of the proposed framework. Later, I will introduce key findings from my research which relate to participants' human wellbeing. Finally, while the empirical evidence gathered in this study is not fully sufficient to examine the impact of returnees on the development of their communities of return, participants' views regarding their potential contributions to their localities will be considered. It is worth clarifying that, while the variables that I will analyse in this process could be considered numerous, my interest lies specifically in the dynamic interactions and intersections between them. Beyond exploring each aspect, this chapter examines to what extent these intersections have facilitated, or prevented, the (re)integration of certain return migrants more than others in the two settings.

7.1. The (re)integration dimensions

Similar to the analysis undertaken when considering participants' integration experiences in the USA (see Chapter 4), the examination of their (re)integration processes in Mexico includes utilisation of the various dimensions included in the proposed framework. This analysis will allow me to address important functional aspects of the lives of returnees, such as access to official documentation, livelihoods, and their civic and political participation. Moreover, returnees' development and/or re-establishment of social bonds and bridges, as well as their cultural orientation and identification, will be considered.

Figure 9. '(Re)integration framework'



Source: Author's model based on Ager and Strang 2008; Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Heckmann 2006; Spencer and Charsley 2016; Vathi 2017; Wright 2012

7.1.1. Structural dimension

For me it was a huge problem not having a Mexican ID [upon arrival]. As none of my [USA] IDs were accepted, I could not pay for anything with my credit card and had problems buying everything I needed. I could not understand, why did they not accept my *matrícula consular* as an ID here in Mexico? It is crazy! A Mexican document that is widely accepted in the States, it is not [accepted] in Mexico. In order to get the INE¹⁰⁸ I needed to have a Mexican ID, a birth certificate and a proof of residency. How would I have those documents if I had just been deported?

¹⁰⁸ People often refer to the voting card issued by the National Electoral Institute as INE. This card, beyond solely being used as an official document to prove Mexicans' identity in the ballots, became

While the vast majority of participants had obtained the identification documents required to navigate the Mexican system at the time of the interview, many – particularly people who had been deported – faced similar problems to those of Nadia (MC, 35) upon arrival. Participants also acknowledged other barriers to obtaining the required identification documents, including lengthy processes, lack of adequate information and/or insufficient financial resources to cover the expenses associated with these processes. Another common obstacle was migrants' reluctance to approach the relevant institutions due to, as discussed in the previous chapter, their generalised distrust of the government. In Natalia's (MC, 28) words: "...everything here is very bureaucratic, the paperwork never ends and it won't take you anywhere. They give you the run-around and if they don't give you a solution then they say that it is because you did not bring 'this' and 'this' and 'that.' You cannot really trust them [governmental institutions]."

Furthermore, in order to obtain other official documents for themselves or their children (e.g. official recognition of foreign studies or inscription of a birth certificate in a civil registry), many participants needed to request documentation from the USA. For some of them, this represented an obstacle due to their limited or non-existent networks in the USA and/or their limited financial resources.

Overall, access to documentation was identified as more problematic in Mexico City than the rural site due to the nature of participants' needs, as well as the unprepared fashion of their (often forced) return. Some negative consequences of not having the required documents immediately after arrival identified by participants were their inability to rent a property, become affiliated to *Seguro Popular* (universal health insurance), find better-paid employment, have full access to the education system, or to any other governmental support. This 'unintended' exclusion of returnees from institutional life in Mexico was considered by many informants as "starting [their lives back in the country] on the wrong foot." Unfortunately, this 'undocumented status' has a long-term impact on the lives of returnees and/or their US-born children, many of whom are unable to fulfil their fundamental human right to have a legally registered identity in Mexico.

the country's preferred credential so it is also used to prove Mexicans' identities in banks, nightclubs and many other governmental and civic processes.

In relation to their post-return livelihoods, most participants were economically active¹⁰⁹ at the time of the interview but very often complained about their precarious financial situation and how this had an impact on their effective (re)integration. Among respondents who managed to find a livelihood opportunity, there were some (approximately one-third) who reported working formally but the majority were working informally. In general, transfer of skills was described as extremely limited in both sites. Concerning differences between sites, there is a balanced distribution of people who stated being employed in the formal sector within both localities, but contrary to the case of Mexico City, in Huaquechula (as mentioned in the last chapter) most of the people who managed to leave the informal sector were employed by the local government. This situation is similar to that which Osorno and Romero (2014) found in other rural communities in Puebla, where the only (scarce) formal employment opportunities for returnees were at the government. While participants described their employment as positive, as they received a fixed and stable income for at least four years¹¹⁰, they also identified two key disadvantages: they had limited powers of action and influence in their job roles, and their salaries were much lower than they had expected. Regarding her salary, Erika (H, 52) said: “Even if I am working for the government, my income is less than the minimum wage I was getting in the USA as an undocumented migrant. Overall, salaries are very low in Mexico.” Unfortunately, for the clear majority, the skills gained while in the USA (primarily through employment in the hospitality and construction sectors – see Chapter 4), did not help returnees to find a formal job upon return to the rural site.

For the informants in Mexico City, being bi-cultural and fluent in English, as well as having experience in customer service (all skills gained abroad), were the most valuable assets for people who were formally employed – mainly in the call centre industry. Employment in call centres was reported to be popular, mostly among young people, as they could perform a relatively simple job for a reasonable salary in this industry. Additionally, due to the transnational nature of this industry, returnees had access to peers with whom they shared cultural codes that they did not share with other non-migrants; they were exposed to a familiar work environment; and, most importantly, they had (telephone) access to the USA. All of these aspects provided them with a sense of continuity in their lives while being away

¹⁰⁹ From the total, 28 reported being self-employed, 16 employed, 4 were both employed and had a business, 4 were students and 8 were unemployed.

¹¹⁰ The municipal governmental period lasts for four years, and it is an extremely common practice that each president changes all the cabinet members of staff when they assume office.

from 'home'. For those with experience in roles involving unskilled labour, finding employment in the formal sector was almost impossible. For others, transferring their skills had been difficult as they were too specific to the more technically advanced and specialised needs of employers in the USA. For example, German (MC, 53) and Moises (MC, 30) had been unable to find a job in the construction sector, as they had expected to, because the techniques used in the USA were not well known in Mexico and the materials required were too expensive. Therefore, their skills were not in great demand in the country. Overall, we can conclude that, despite the fact that the majority of my participants were economically active at the time of the interview, only a few had formal access to employment and the majority, therefore, did not have access to any social protection. Furthermore, very few participants were able to implement the skills gained through their work experience in the USA.

Other differences existed between the sites. The number of unemployed participants was higher in Mexico City and the number of self-employed participants was higher in the rural area. Self-employment was not always participants' first option, but often a response to their inability to access the formal labour market (Amassari 2003; Kveder and Flahaux 2014). In terms of self-employment, there were own-account workers providing services, however the majority of participants reported owning (small) businesses that were set up using funds earned while working abroad. Business development had been, for the majority, a challenging experience. As mentioned in Chapter 6, some of the difficulties that participants faced with regard to business development were linked to the context (e.g. generalised insecurity and lack of capital flow); however, in other cases they were linked to the returnees' lack of knowledge and business experience, including business development and management, as well as local business practices. As an example, Sandra (H, 40) and her family set up a business upon return to Mexico. She said the following regarding her experience,

In the USA, I worked in a beauty salon and my husband always worked in restaurants and bars. Upon our arrival, we did not want to work for anyone else, we wanted to have our own business but we did not want to open another restaurant or another beauty salon. There are so many here and there and very few manage to survive, so we bought a *tortillería*¹¹¹. Unfortunately, this was a wrong decision, and we struggled with it since day one. We came from another country and were used to doing things differently, here we found many problems to open our

¹¹¹ A *tortillería* is a place that makes and sells *tortillas*. *Tortilla* is a traditional Mexican flat bread (which looks like a pancake) made from maize flour, usually eaten hot with a savoury filling.

business. To start with, we did the paperwork incorrectly, that error cost us a lot of money because they fined us. When we finally managed to open, we realised that compared with other *tortillerías* our prices were high and, as people from the neighbourhood did not know us, they were even less interested in buying from us. We were very tight with money, we could barely cover our basic needs so after eight months, we decided to close. We lost all our investment.

After this experience, Sandra and her husband tried re-emigrating to the USA (twice) and set up a different business; unfortunately, these attempts to improve their livelihoods were also unsuccessful. As a response to their situation, they decided to start working their land, and Sandra said the following about that experience: “[...] Our farm is now what is helping us to survive. While it has also been a trial and error experience, things are going better now. I guess the most difficult part for my husband was to know what were the best poisons [fertilisers] to use, and how to find good clients for the sorghum.” Furthermore, they decided that their eldest son (US-born) should re-migrate as soon as he turned 18 years old in order to try to find a job and send remittances to the family. Despite Sandra and her family’s return preparedness, their livelihood (re)integration has been an ongoing process of adaptation and negotiation, which has involved the rediscovery of the true characteristics and potential of their community of return.

The businesses most commonly established by returnees in Huaquechula were (American-style) restaurants, stalls and corner shops. While food businesses give migrants the opportunity to transfer the skills gained while in the USA within a small budget, unfortunately these enterprises very often fail. Rogelio (H, 54) was one of the few participants who considered his enterprise successful. He stated that the key to the success of his business was to “always have it on the side of something else, either a waged job or agricultural work so there is the possibility for mutual re-investment and the family does not depend solely on one income.” Rogelio and his family were living on the revenues of his business, a disability pension, and a small rental income paid by the government for the use of their land. For many other returnees, whose economic (re)integration depended solely on the investment of their (limited) savings, their lack of alternative sources of income, as well as of business experience and advice, renders them ill-equipped and vulnerable to any financial shocks. Therefore, returnees commonly failed to sustain their microenterprises, which often affected their not just their material, but overall, wellbeing. Esther (H, 37) talked about this: “The return is depressing, one feels overwhelmed and many times powerless

while trying to start your life from scratch. It is hard to fail over and over again, and get no support. One expects that to happen over there [USA] but not here.”

7.1.2. Civic and political participation dimension

Concerning returnees' participation in Mexican civic and political institutions, while some of the informants mentioned being involved, the majority were not. Returnees in Mexico City stated that they were participating in specific events, such as casting their vote during elections or joining a demonstration. Some other participants (as mentioned in Chapter 6) were somewhat involved or had participated in advocacy activities (e.g. consultation meetings to develop the PND) with the aim of promoting returnees' rights. Returnees' involvement in Huaquechula's political arena included voting in elections, and (as stated earlier) working for the local government. Some of the reasons behind returnees' political involvement were mentioned by Nadia (MC, 35): “We [her and her family] do not miss voting in any election, we value the vote, maybe it is because in the States we did not have the chance to do it. [...] I think we [return migrants] value concepts such as participation, democracy and accountability more because we have experienced them.” In relation to the reasons given for returnees' lack of participation in politics, these were generally linked to the low levels of trust in the ability of the local and federal governments to act efficiently and transparently. Specifically, in Huaquechula people identified political cleavages between the two main political parties (PAN and PRI) as the reason for their mistrust of, and lack of involvement with, the local government.

When asked to compare the civic and political participation of returnees and non-migrants, the majority of participants considered that there are significant differences between them. On the one hand (as mentioned earlier), due to their experiences in the USA, returnees were considered to be more critical and sceptical of the Mexican government, and they therefore became apathetic during electoral times. On the other, they considered non-migrants as being less critical of the system and/or sceptical about benefiting from practices such as clientelism. Another reason identified is that returnees do not feel part of Mexican society and therefore do not get involved in politics. In this regard, Pablo (H, 43) said: “While migrants have experience of how things can be different, they participate much less in politics. They choose it that way, I am not sure why. It might be that they do not have enough time to do it since they have to find a way to survive, or it might be that they feel less identified with their community and government.”

Contrary to this argument, in Huquechula some informants mentioned that returnees are often invited to join the local government due to the financial contributions that they can make to the campaign. Erika (H, 35) said, “In general non-migrants participate more since returnees are not very interested, but in our case [she and her husband] we were invited to be part of the electoral campaign team. I guess they look after people who have money to invest.” Additionally, Erika highlighted that it is more common to see migrant women than non-migrant women in politics because they are considered as more liberal and empowered upon return.

With regard to contextual aspects, Patricia (MC, 38) was very critical of the various approaches that the federal government has towards promoting the political participation of migrants in the USA and upon return. In her words, “they [the government] care about those there [USA], not about us [returnees]. Those migrants are considered as powerful, just imagine, how many are they? Let’s say, many millions. These are millions of people who can potentially send remittances, influence the Mexican-American community, and now even vote! Of course they care of what they think not about us who are now less powerful.”

We can conclude that, despite the initial challenges in accessing a voting card (INE) mentioned earlier in this chapter, returnees have relatively good access to participate in basic political activities, such as elections. Furthermore, some other participants, due to their enhanced civic and political awareness, are either involved in advocacy activities or employed in local government. Having said this, the main obstacles remain their mistrust in the overall social and governmental system, feeling a partial sense of belonging, and their need to devote their time address their most basic needs.

7.1.3. Social dimension: social bonds and bridges

In her research on Ethiopian returnees, Kuschminder concludes that the (re)integration prospects of migrants are significantly impacted by the type and strength of their social networks (2017:111). In relation to the Mexican case, with the exception of a handful of cases, returnees’ (re)integration very often relies on bonds with family members (e.g. parents, siblings, children or spouses) on either side of the border. This social support was identified as particularly helpful for those who returned “empty handed” to “get back on their feet.” Regarding this point, Tony (H, 34) said, “[ability to (re)integrate] depends how you lived your life in the States, if you managed to have a good life [work and save money] there, you will be OK. If you did wrong like me, you will have nothing [assets] here. In this case it is very important to have good family support.” In addition to the material support provided,

returnees' psychosocial needs were also satisfied through these bonds. As an example, Roberto (H, 40), who was deported to Mexico leaving his wife and children behind, said "when you arrive you feel totally lost, depressed. Your whole life is upside down. At that moment, I just wanted to drink and forget about everything. In a situation like this, things get back in place due to your loved ones. My parents were always there for me so when my family [wife and children] arrived, I was readier to welcome them."

While for many, family was a great source of support for their (re)integration, for a few others, family relations became a struggle. Particularly those participants who had fulfilled their familial obligations and expectations often felt that they had paved their way to a supported and more successful return. Unfortunately, in contrast to what they anticipated, return for some participants triggered family disputes over properties and financial resources. As an example, Esther (H, 37) explained,

It [(re)integration] also depends on the family, on the expectations people have of us. It happens to many people, the money is not there and the relationship breaks, you are not useful any more, you are not welcomed. I think, many times, the money people send is not used properly, people [their relatives] become lazy and they are not using the remittances properly. The government is creating programmes to support migrants' families without noticing that they might have even been taking advantage of us.

Regarding their later (re)integration processes, participants mentioned that their social networks were comprised of relationships they were able to resume, primarily with extended family, and in other cases also with old friends and neighbours. Other participants also mentioned developing bonds with returnees, but particularly with non-migrants, through spaces such as work or school. While people referred to their "lack of time" as an obstacle to bonding with others, these spaces became key to their social lives.

Significant aspects that influenced returnees' social networks beyond the family system were age at migration, time spent abroad and their social integration while in the USA. For those who migrated at an advanced age, their time spent abroad was relatively short and, as they did not manage to integrate into the mainstream society while in the USA, it was common to resume their 'old' relationships upon their return rather than to develop new ones. As an example, Pilar (MC, 39), who migrated at the age of 24 after marrying a migrant and lived in the USA for five years as a housewife, said "I resumed the relationships I had before, maybe it was the fact that I was not away for long that meant it was easy for me to reconnect with everyone." In contrast, Tony (H, 37), who migrated when he was 14 years

old with his whole family, lived in the USA for 22 years where he studied, started two families and was part of a gang, needed to develop new relationships upon his return. Regarding his experience, he said: “It was hard, in the beginning I had no one to talk to. I just had my grandmother who I was living with but she is quite old, what were we supposed to talk about? It was not until a guy who I knew from there [USA] was deported that I was able to hang out with someone of my age.”

Another aspect identified as relevant for developing social networks was the place of return. As previously mentioned (in Chapter 5), while they were few in number, some migrants returned or moved to entirely different places to those that they had left for the USA; therefore, it was common for them to have weak social networks, particularly during the first few years following their arrival. For some (young) people like Damián (MC, 23), a secondary migration movement offered them the possibility to move away from their family network, which they found extremely alien to their new selves:

Since I started university [in Mexico City], I do not go to my *ranchito* [hometown] very often. I always use as an excuse that I don't have time but the reality is that I don't go because it is boring. Life is very different over there. Being with my cousins is boring, they just talk about parties... what happened at the last party, when the next party will be. I enjoy deeper conversations, political debates and stuff. Also, when I am there, I feel completely out of place. My work is very passive. As a research student, most of the time I am sitting in front of a computer while my cousins go out to the fields to take care of the animals, and the women are in the kitchen. Overall, I feel uncomfortable.

For others, the experience of being in an unknown environment made them feel alien. Julieta (H, 47), who is originally from Atlixco but decided to live in Huaquechula (her husband's hometown) upon her return, said: “when I first moved here I knew no one, my entire world was these three [husband and two children]. But fortunately, later on, thanks to the group [women's group promoted by a local NGO] I met other returnees.” Julieta identified that, beyond the instrumental gains of joining a local organisation (functional and psychosocial support), the people she met through this network became those she could rely on in times of need. Unfortunately, while joining community activities enabled some returnees to strengthen their social networks and improve their (re)integration experiences and psychosocial wellbeing, it was an option available to very few participants and others did not feel that they had the time for these activities.

Other issues affecting returnees' social networks were often linked to contextual aspects specific to each locality. For example, some returnees in Huaquechula recounted that, while

they wanted to resume relationships that they had previous to their departure, it was common for them to learn that their social networks had shrunk due to the high emigration movements in this site (Kuschminder 2017:118). Fortunately, the reduced number of people in the town, as well as the close connections between people, facilitated their ability to reconnect. Roberto (H, 40) narrated, “We do not know each other any longer. I think it is something to be expected after being away for 17 years. Many people my age are not here anymore, they are there [USA]. But because the town is not big, people know you are the son of ‘such’ and ‘such’ but there is no personal friendship. You have to reconnect.” Additionally, people often mentioned being resistant to contacting people beyond their trusted social network, in an attempt to avoid uncomfortable situations such as requests for financial support which they were unable and/or unwilling to provide. Hugo’s (H, 47) experience was as follows: “people [non-migrants] think we came back with bags of money, it is common to hear that *fulanito* [this person] approached *fulanita* [that other person] asking for money. In the beginning I used to lend them [money], but since I realised that people don’t pay back, I don’t do it anymore.” Avoiding contacting those outside of their trusted networks also hindered both the creation of social bridges with non-migrants and the development of stronger bonds among returnees; therefore, the networks that they could rely on were mainly limited to their families.

In Mexico City, people often referred to having more opportunities to develop new social networks, as people there had more access to spaces for socialisation, such as work places and education institutions than those in Huaquechula. In general, participants mentioned being able to build relationships with non-migrants, with the exception of young returnees (1.5 generation). Some young participants blamed their busy schedules for this, others acknowledged that they face certain resistance and/or reluctance when interacting with non-migrants’ due to their differences in culture and limited language skills. Therefore, the networks of participants working in call centres were primarily comprised of other returnees, but for those who were not working in these bi-cultural and bi-lingual environments, things proved to be much harder. In the words of Moises (MC, 30):

I realised that it is difficult to develop friendships with Mexicans, I feel there is a wall between us. I would say that I have acquaintances but not friends. Over there [USA] I did not have to struggle to blend in, I understood the culture, here I do not understand it. The language makes it even more difficult. In [border city], I had a friend who was deported like me. He understood my culture, we had the same experience, we shared the struggles of being away from the family, I connected

well with him. Now, I am on my own, I can say that he has been my only friend in Mexico.

In relation to their social ties with the USA, only two participants mentioned that they did not have any cross-border links. As for the rest, while many participants' transnational social networks were considered strong or good upon arrival, as time passed communication became less frequent and their relationships with people in the USA became weaker. In terms of channels of communication, the majority mentioned using social media and messaging applications, such as Facebook and Whatsapp, on a daily basis. For more intimate exchanges, some people preferred communicating by telephone. Some others, the minority, were able to travel to the USA and meet their loved ones, which made their transnational links with the USA stronger. When asked how much of their time they devoted to communication with family and friends in the USA, the majority said that following arrival in Mexico the time spent was much more; however, distance and the natural course of life had subsequently weakened their networks. On this point, Nadia (MC, 35) said: "It [transnational communication] has changed a lot, now I would say it is 70 percent with people in Mexico and 30 percent in the USA, but before it was the other way around. Time and distance have influenced my relationships [...] It is difficult to be *that* close when there is physical distance between people, we are also in various life stages, my friends have moved on, married, had babies, I haven't."

The examination of transnationalism from a return perspective is an emerging area of research that is currently being developed (Kuschminder 2017:36; see also Carling and Erdal 2014). King and Christou (2011; 2014) have labelled this 'reverse transnationalism'. For Mexican returnees, I can conclude that one of the aspects that influenced the diminished transnational links of my research participants was the inability of most of them to travel back to the USA. For the very few who were able to travel to the USA, the transnational connections were definitely stronger, more meaningful, as well as less (emotionally) painful. Additionally, as we will see later in this chapter, individuals with access to the USA had the tendency to have a bidirectional self-orientation. Therefore, it could be argued that, apart from those few who could travel to the USA and those who declared having no contact with people in the USA, the vast majority practised what Carling and Erdal have labelled as 'residual transnationalism', focusing primarily on maintaining ties with family members (2014:7). Having said this, it is worth highlighting that, while participants' transnational links

are limited, it does not necessarily translate into stronger networks in Mexico or better social (re)integration.

Based on my informants' testimonies, I suggest that in addition to type and strength of social networks, the ways in which significant relationships are transformed by return and post-return experiences deeply affect returnees' (re)integration experiences. The transformation of relationships seems to be an expected outcome considering that half of the people who had to leave the USA were more or less forced to leave their families behind, and that the return of more than half of my participants was, in one way or another, motivated by gendered life cycle aspects (see Chapter 5). These separations and reunifications within the complex context examined in the previous chapter very often contributed to an alteration of the family dynamics. Therefore, almost a third of my participants' families were fragmented upon return, or as a consequence of it. Some participants felt that their relationships faded away due to distance and time; in the words of Angeles (MC, 62):

My children and my husband already forgot about me. I think my husband got desperate and he even found someone else. He must have thought 'she did not get the documents, she will stay there' and he looked for someone else. For a man it is always more difficult to be on their own than for a woman. The first three years he came to visit and also used to send me stuff. In the fourth year, he disappeared [for two years]. He recently contacted me, and sent me some stuff with my sister, like in the good times.

Unfortunately, other participants described that, due to the deterioration of their relationship, at a certain point the domestic violence experienced in the USA worsened. As an example, Pilar (MC, 39), who decided to return because her husband was being abusive towards her, said:

Over there [USA] his 'hands were tied'. He knew that if he touched [beat] me, he would go back to jail. When we arrived here, things were not what we expected and everything got out of hand. His family did not support him [to start a business], he had an [car] accident, we had no money... he was very frustrated [...] we were fighting every day, things got really bad. There was a point where we were hitting each other in front of the children, so I left him.

Similar situations were experienced by other women, such as Claudia (MC, 43), Julieta (H, 47), Sandra (H, 40) and Susana (MC, 35), who also stated that various aspects of the Mexican social and cultural context were affecting their relationships¹¹². In Susana's words:

¹¹² These aspects were discussed in detail during the focus group conducted in Mexico City.

"[...] I realised that it was the system here [Mexico], it was the *machismo*¹¹³ that was affecting us. Over there, as a woman, you have more freedom and more [legal] protection; as a man, you have less [financial and social] pressures." As a consequence of the breakdown of relationships with their spouses, some of these participants became single mothers. Over time, a couple of them – from the urban site – remarried. For those living in Huaquechula, the possibility of starting a new relationship seemed unlikely. In Luisa's words (H, 29): "men over here [Huaquechula] see you and think 'she has been in *el otro lado* [USA] and she is on her own so it should be easier to hook up with her.' They just want to *pasar el rato* [hang out], nothing serious."

Concerning the men's experiences, while they also had separations from their spouses, none of them became the primary caregiver for their children and, unlike in the women's case, just a couple of them did not re-marry. Furthermore, some participants mentioned that in contrast to the case of women, men returning from the USA are usually valued as "marriage material." For example, Adrian (H, 44) said: "I think some women look for stability and safety, and a migrant many times can offer that." With regard to those participants who were unmarried when they returned to Mexico (a quarter of the sample), it was interesting to observe that, with the exception of three men from Huaquechula, the majority did not change their relationship status during their post-return experience. Particularly, young migrants (1.5 generation) were quite vocal about this situation. They explained that some of the reasons behind their struggles to find partners were related to functional issues, such as their unfamiliarity with the "hook up culture" in Mexico. In Charlie's words (MC, 22): "I did not know how to approach the girls over here [Mexico]... Over there [USA] I could meet any girl in a mall and by the end of the day we would be at the club, easy! But I did not feel confident to do the same here."

Some other participants talked about more complex obstacles, such as being unable to find a spouse who shared their cultural background and life-style. In the following excerpt, Nadia (MC, 35), who had recently moved to Mexico City, explains some of the barriers that she had found, and what her expectations were in this area:

I have dated a couple of people but it has not led to anything serious. I think things in Mexico City are quite different from the rest of the country, so I still need to figure out how things will be over here. I must say that my experience in [other city] was not great [...] There is a lot of *machismo* and the worst of it is that it is very

¹¹³ In the Mexican context, *machismo* could be explained as an exaggerated sense of masculinity, involving behaviours such as control over women and aggressiveness.

normalised [...] even my girlfriends used to tell me that I did not need to take it so seriously and had to be less outspoken or I would scare them [...] I cannot believe they were saying that. At a point I lost hope and decided to start looking abroad, so I started dating online. I established a relationship with someone in Canada but due to the distance, we broke up [...] I think I really need to have a relationship with someone who has lived abroad, he doesn't necessarily have to speak English [...] I have my ups and downs [about her thoughts of being able to find a partner], at the moment, I feel a bit more optimistic.

Overall, it has been demonstrated that returnees' social bonds and bridges are crucial factors for their readjustment. Specifically, returnees' decisions to interact only with other return migrants, with non-migrants and/or people living in the USA, impact significantly in their ability to develop their social capital. As may be expected, those who had supportive families were able to reconnect with their social networks and had access to new spaces for socialising felt more affinity with their peers, and even acquired a certain status (on both sides of the border), had better life satisfaction and wellbeing. Unfortunately, this was the case for a very small number of people. As for the rest, we can say that they had weak relationships, confined to immediate family and friendship circles which was detrimental for their process.

Furthermore, from these accounts we can conclude that returnees' post-return experiences in this dimension were different for men and women. Upon family separation, either as a consequence of the return itself or of the life constraints upon return, the burden of childcare fell primarily on women and establishing new sentimental relationships was less common for them. The former is linked to the gendered role as primary carers conferred on them by the moral norms and social expectations of the Mexican society. The latter is related to the sense of empowerment that many women experience, which translates in their need to establish relationships based on the principle of equality and respect where they can exercise their capacity for personal autonomy. As we observed throughout this chapter, the gender dimension of the (re)integration experiences adds another level of complexity to returnees' relational wellbeing.

7.1.4. Cultural dimension: cultural orientation and identification

As discussed in previous chapters (2 and 4), the relevance of the cultural domain in the migrants' integration and (re)integration strategies is based on the argument that culture is an important determinant of attitudes and behaviours (Berry 2005:704). In this section, we will analyse which factors determine the cultural identification and orientation of returnees in both locations of study. The concept of cultural identification will be used to refer to migrants'

feelings of belonging and identification with groups, particularly in the forms of ethnic, regional, local and/or national identification, or in sophisticated combinations of these (Heckman 2006:17). In relation to returnees' cultural identification, they often identified themselves as one of the following: unidirectional orientation towards Mexico, unidirectional orientation towards the USA, or a transnational and bidirectional orientation towards both. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) termed the last option a transnational way of belonging. The term cultural orientation will be used in the context of this research to discuss participants' alignment towards cultural values and practices of the place of migration or of the place of origin and/or return (Berry 1985).

When I enquired about how they self-identified upon return, participants' responses were very similar to those given when talking about their lives in the USA, where the majority self-identified as Mexican. A second group developed a local modality of self-identification as opposed to a national one, therefore they were *Chilangos* or *Huaquechulenes*. A third group identified themselves in a hyphenated way, as Mexican-American. Lastly, a fourth group of participants, in contrast to what happened while in the USA, self-identified as migrants. Unsurprisingly, people within the former two groups migrated to the USA at a later stage of their lives and those within the latter two groups, almost all, migrated as children (1.5 generation). As an example, Nadia (similarly to other participants) described how the (re)definition of her identity had involved a complex process upon return, whereby her cultural orientation and identification was not attached solely to the USA or to Mexico but to an in-between state (Lulle 2017; Glick Schiller and Irving 2014:2). Cultural orientation and identification were most complex for people like Nadia, who despite their inability to legally integrate in the USA, managed to do so in practical terms. In Nadia's words,

The way I feel about it [identification] has not changed, but the way I express it or identify myself with others, has. Upon my arrival [in Mexico], I chose to identify myself as *Mexicana* because I figured out that this was the best strategy to avoid discrimination, so I did not express this bi-cultural feeling very often. Also, as I had just been deported, I felt very angry, I felt that I did not really belong to that place [USA], so I would say I was Mexican. The problem then was that others would not believe me, they would make me feel that I was not Mexican enough to be Mexican...They could often tell me that I did not sound like a Mexican or I did not think like a Mexican [...] I went through a real identity crisis, I was *ni de aquí, ni de allá* [neither from here nor from there] [...] For me it is no longer only a question of self-identification, it is also a political stance, I want to challenge identity stereotypes to help others see that *being Mexican* is much more complex than what they think [...] I would say I am a return migrant, I am 'dreamer', a 'deported dreamer', a Mexican-American but I no longer say I am Mexican, sometimes I say I am originally from Mexico, which is different.

Participants' self-identification as migrants was related to their acknowledgment of how the migration experience had changed their lives. For others, being a migrant was related to their desire to continue with the mobility previously experienced. Either in an actual sense, by crossing borders like Natalia (MC, 28): "I have crossed the border several times and my life plan is to keep doing it", or in a symbolic and/or political sense as in the case of Elba (MC, 23), who identified herself as a "citizen of the world", highlighting the fact that for her "borders are a real disgrace for humanity."

Some of the cultural aspects that the majority of the participants valued and missed from the USA include ideas about: (i) democracy and trust in institutions; (ii) civility (rights entitlement, cleanliness and order); (iii) women's rights and their opportunities to attain a better status; (iv) respect and appreciation for ethnic diversity; and (v) work culture (professionalism, hard work and having an incentive/promotion system). For many, particularly the work culture and the opportunities that this made available to them (even as undocumented migrants), was something that they felt they lacked upon return. As an example, Mauricio (H, 60) elaborated: "[I miss] mainly the work culture, in any given job you have more opportunities than here. There are always options to move up, if you work hard, you can go higher."

Additionally, cultural aspects such as food – particularly its diversity, or the use of the English language and local celebrations (e.g. Christmas, Independence Day, the Super Bowl or Thanksgiving) were referred to by a few participants as aspects of the American culture that they yearned for. Many others, almost half of the sample, mentioned not missing anything from the American culture other than their life-style (consumer culture), including their purchasing power and the comforts that they were able to afford.

In terms of what returnees appreciate about the Mexican culture, for some participants being able to speak their language gave them a sense of freedom. One-third valued the opportunity to be back in their community "enjoying the generosity and kindness of their people" and, more importantly, to be reunited with their loved ones. While these relational aspects were strongly valued by many participants, it must be noted that for some of them these were simultaneously considered as a burden. In this regard, Erika (H, 52) elaborated on her views:

Over there [USA] family ties are not so strong, since you are 18 [years old], you are out there, on your own and when you get old, they send you to a care home. In Mexico family ties are highly valued, we care for each other. Truth is that this

[relational culture] also affects us, and it will affect our children in the future. For example, right now my husband and I are here because we have to take care of his mom. But if we were all in the States, his mother would be at the care home since a long time ago and he would be living his life. We are not living our life here, we are living the life of his mother... and this is our culture, for good and for bad.

Many others highlighted Mexico's historical and traditional richness as something that they are more able to appreciate upon return. Particularly participants from Huaquechula enthusiastically mentioned celebrations such as *día de la Santa Cruz* (day of the Holy Cross) and *día de Muertos* (Death's day) as extremely relevant celebrations that helped them to reconnect with their community. While Mexico's cultural heritage was valued by people from both the urban and the rural community, as well as people who left the country when very young or older, their personal attachment to the culture was experienced differently. As an example, Roberto (H, 40) described how Huaquechula's cultural heritage makes him feel rooted and gives him a sense of belonging: "I am happy that now I can enjoy the celebrations, like the one of the third of May [day of the Holy Cross], I love the *ferias*. It sends me back to my childhood memories and makes me realise that this is the place where I belong. I have my roots here." In contrast to the experience of Roberto, Damián (MC, 23) also mentioned enjoying the Mexican celebrations but more as something that would help him to better understand his parents; yet, these celebrations still feel alien to him: "I like the traditional celebrations, the *ferias*, the local festivities [...] Now that I am more exposed to the Mexican culture I think I am more able to understand what my parents tried to explain to me. Somehow, I feel I have more in common with my parents." The experiences of Roberto and Damián allow us to understand how, for some returnees, returning to Mexico was experienced as a 'homecoming', whilst for others it was experienced as going back to a place they do not belong to.

As has become clear throughout this case study, Mexican return migrants have, to differing degrees, undergone a process of cultural change while in the USA, and may return with new or reinforced values, cultural frameworks and knowledge. Some of them, who have more of a traditionalist approach, did not experience any major changes. In Janet's (MC, 35) words, "you could not notice that I had been in the States, my accent was the same, my look was the same. I was like *any other* Mexican." In contrast, other participants highlighted that they experienced clashes with non-migrants for 'being different'. As introduced in the last chapter, participants considered that very often non-migrants had the impression that returnees felt 'superior' and often viewed them with a mixture of suspicion and jealousy

(Smith 2006:270), thereby making them feel unwelcome. In the words of Angeles (MC, 62): “People even reject you for having been there [USA], I feel they see you with certain envy. They are critical of how you dress, of how you speak, of what you say. Yes, you arrive being different, you dress different, what is the problem with that? I know I am not superior, I am just different.” This study highlights the need and relevance of looking at cultural identification and orientation when studying Mexican return. As has been emphasised by several participants, the degree to which they feel welcomed and respected impacts on how and to what extent they feel part of their communities of return.

7.2. Returnees’ human wellbeing

The following section addresses key findings related to participants’ own opinions on what helps and hinders returnees’ (re)integration processes, and their human wellbeing. The outcome of this self-assessment affects participants’ sense of belonging and long-term life expectations.

7.2.1. (Re)integration, drivers and inhibitors

To the question, what helps (or hinders) returnees to (re)integrate into Mexican society?, participants gave a diverse range of very insightful responses. The most common replies (in order of importance) were: having a strong support network; readiness to return, particularly having accumulated enough (financial and material) resources; and other aspects such as age at migration, time spent abroad, having a positive attitude and being resilient. These factors were followed by place of return; willingness to return/degree of agency in the decision making; and livelihood opportunities.

With regard to age at migration and time spent abroad, King (1986, 2000), among other authors, has stated that (re)integration tends to be more difficult when people migrated at an early age and/or had spent longer abroad (see also Cassarino 2004; Gmelch 1980). Moises (H, 30) provided some evidence to support this statement: “I think (re)integration is supposed to be easier for those who have previously lived in Mexico. They have the advantage of knowing the place and they might be able to speak the language. For me, coming back to a place I left almost 30 years ago (when I was a baby) has been difficult. Even my Spanish is not very good, people often ask me where I am from...” Interestingly, the cases of a few people who migrated at a later stage in life (late 40s and early 50s) and spent much shorter periods of time abroad, contradict this tenet. In their cases, duration was

less significant than their experiences abroad. Overall, the ability to live an active life in the USA (e.g. access to work and financial independence) contrasted with how a person at their stage of life lives in Mexico. As an example, Maria Luisa said (MC, 64): “[Upon return] I felt as if my life had come to an end [...], as if my fate was to become a ‘stay-at-home housewife’. I was coming to terms with this idea when I managed to get my [USA] visa. I could not believe my luck... life gave me a second chance.” While Maria Luisa had her family, house, and felt culturally identified in Mexico, her inability to access a pension – as a result of having worked in the informal sector for most of her life – or employment that helped her to be (financially) independent, made her feel that Mexico was an unsuitable place for her.

As detailed in Chapter 6, returnees’ post-return wellbeing and their ability to (re)integrate are also influenced by structural constraints (Cassarino 2004; Erdal and Oeppen 2017; King and Skeldon 2010). While there were some exceptions, rural sites and smaller cities were identified as places with more limited opportunities. In Ana’s words: “If I were living in my ex [husband’s] town, I would be stuck in the same situation as in the USA, but poorer. There are no opportunities there, no jobs, no access to higher education.” Other participants highlighted that due to the job scarcity in Mexico it is valuable to return to the same place that they had left for the USA in order to be able to reconnect with social networks which might increase the chances of finding employment. This argument correlates with findings presented earlier in this chapter, where participants very often felt ill-equipped to (re)integrate due to their limited financial and material resources. Therefore, social networks, particularly family bonds, were crucial to help them resume their lives back in Mexico. As German (MC, 53) said, “The place of return also influences, it might be better to (re)integrate to a place where you know the people and the neighbourhood. After all, your personal connections are there and that is what counts to find a job here [Mexico].”

Being materially, but more importantly, emotionally ready (readiness), and having the ability to make their own free choices to return (willingness), or not, conform to what Cassarino called return preparedness (2004). Furthermore, according to this author, the migration cycle is composed of three phases: emigration, immigration and return, and the links between these stages help to resolve the eventual outcomes of migrants’ cycles. Furthermore, Cassarino (2016) describes three possible ways in which these cycles culminate, namely complete (full agency), incomplete (no agency) or interrupted (relative agency). These cycles emphasise the importance of returnees’ preparedness for the psychosocial wellbeing of participants and, therefore, their likelihood of (re)integration. In the

words of Ricardo (MC, 36) “It [(re)integration] depends on your financial resources, but above all, on your emotional capacity to accept that now you have another lifestyle, that you are in a new environment, with another type of people. It took me four years to accept that I was here [...]” This ‘acceptance’ that Ricardo and other participants referred to, was associated with returnees’ need to negotiate between their lives in the USA, the expectations they had of their lives back in Mexico, and the reality they encountered. However, in other cases, it was used when referring to migrants’ need to cope with their forced or compelled return and its consequences. As an example, Luis (MC, 32) mentioned, “Many times it [the ability to (re)integrate] is not about what happened to you [deportation], but how you resolve it. You can remain frustrated and resentful, or accept your reality and try to have a good life here [Mexico].” As we can see from this interview excerpt, Luis identified a dynamic correlation between type of return, psychosocial wellbeing (coping with the situation), and returnees’ ability to (re)integrate. Another useful quote that helps us to understand this correlation and the relevance of returnees’ willingness to return is Natalia’s (MC, 28): “[...] it [ability to (re)integrate] is not just about how much money you are making [material wellbeing] or the people you are hanging out with [relational wellbeing]. No, no, no, I think it has more to do with whatever reason brought you here, and how you feel about it. I think the reason [of return] itself is super important, the fact that you were able (or not) to have a say makes all the difference [...]”

Overall, these findings corroborate canonical accounts which state that age at the times of migration and of return, years spent abroad, return preparedness, place and type of return are significant factors that could positively influence returnees’ (re)integration and wellbeing (Cassarino 2004, 2009; King 1986; Erdal and Oeppen 2017). Unfortunately, Mexican returnees very often are compelled or forced to return; therefore, they are ill-prepared to face the diverse structural constraints encountered upon return. In this scenario, returnees rely on their own personal resources – social networks, inner strength (grit) and resilience – to (re)integrate.

7.2.2. Life satisfaction

When they were asked to compare their current life satisfaction with that which they felt previous to their return, half of the participants assessed their return in an outspokenly positive way (the majority being from the rural site); some assessed it in an outspokenly negative way (the majority from the urban site); and a few others considered they had no major change in life satisfaction upon their return. Some of the reasons behind participants’

enhanced wellbeing were related to their ability to meet their relational needs, personal safety and life enjoyment (see Chapter 5). For example, Hernan (H, 37) stated that being surrounded by his family enjoying their new house made him feel happy and proud. Some other participants, like Elba (MC, 23), highlighted that the best aspect of being back in Mexico was feeling free and safe, as they no longer had to worry about their undocumented status: “despite everything [referring to the negative experience of a forced return], I feel relieved that no one will be able to take me away from here [Mexico]. From now on, whatever I manage to achieve will be my responsibility and if I lose it all it would be because of me, because of my mistakes, but not because of a [immigration] paper. After everything, I feel at peace.” Rodrigo (H, 50), who returned due to health problems, spoke about the positive aspects of living his life at another pace, “[...] here [in Huaquechula] you have time for yourself and your family, over there the lifestyle consumes you. All you can think about is money, time is money, here time is family.”

Furthermore, Rodrigo emphasised the importance of the notion of time by reflecting how his psychosocial wellbeing had improved significantly over the years: “In the beginning I was not doing so well, I used to drink [alcohol], I felt depressed, overwhelmed [...] I did not know how to start [referring to his life in Mexico].” Other participants, like Paco, also made reference to how lengthy the transition to an improved sense of psychosocial wellbeing can be: “It [the return] is a shock, I would say that it takes up to three years to feel better, more adapted.” Unfortunately, for other participants like Sandra (H, 40), time had not seen an improvement in her life satisfaction. In the following quote, she shares the extent to which her overall wellbeing deteriorated considerably since her arrival, and her failed attempts to re-migrate: “at the beginning I felt happy to be back, I was happy to be with my family, I had missed them a lot. When things [financial situation] got difficult we tried going back (two times) but we did not manage to make it and it all just got worse [...] I have problems both here and there, my [alcoholic] husband, my son left [for the USA], we do not have enough money. I do not know what to do [...]”

Sandra’s experience helps me to introduce those of other participants whose life in Mexico was much less satisfactory than the life they had in the host country. For many returnees, as analysed earlier in this chapter, their main concerns were related to their inability to meet their expectations of achieving a certain level of economic security and to provide a ‘good enough life’ for themselves and their ‘loved ones’ (material wellbeing). Equally relevant, their current relational wellbeing was affected by their inability to be with

their families in the USA. In the following extract, Hector (MC, 25) elaborates on how he feels about these various aspects:

I feel bad, disappointed, I imagined that I could (re)do my life down here and what I found was very different. In order to get a simple job, I had to start from scratch, literally! I had to learn Spanish and to start my education from a primary school level. I never imagined it [life in Mexico] could require so much effort, and that I would have no support [...] I miss there [USA], my stuff, my home, my life, my family. I cope with it by getting busy and convincing myself that I will see them again soon, that they might be able to come and visit us here. Overall, I would say that home is still there [USA].

Some participants also commented on the ways in which contextual aspects of their lives in Mexico had influenced their life satisfaction and wellbeing, like Joel (H, 62) who said “I feel sad and disappointed. It is so hard to see how Mexicans are so passive and conformist.” Or German (MC, 53), who adds how the ‘system’ has been relevant in his (re)integration process, “I like more the life over there, the security, the health care, the schools. I have not been able to adapt again to the system we have in Mexico. If you do, it takes time, actually more than adaptation it is a matter of resignation, it is complicated.” Similarly, other participants also mentioned the concept of resignation to refer to their experience of coming to terms with their post-return lives, like Damián (MC, 23) who said, “I feel better than before [upon arrival], I feel less angry, I accepted my situation. I decided to focus on the idea that things happen for a reason.” We can conclude that, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, emotional readiness is an important pre-condition for a positive (re)integration experience which will affect equally the material, psychosocial and relational wellbeing of returnees (Wright 2012b:470). Furthermore, an ability to cope with the disappointment of (re)integration outcomes is key, since returnees’ will often question the validity of their decision to return, and its sustainability.

7.2.3. Sense of belonging and future aspirations

As we will see in this section, returnees’ satisfaction with their (re)integration processes has an impact, not only on their wellbeing, but also it can (re)shape their sense of belonging and future aspirations. As an example, David (H, 31) recounted, “Coming back to Mexico has been a great challenge, it has challenged me in many ways. You need to adapt to a new life style, you need to reassess who you are and where you want to go.” For some others, like Nadia (MC, 35), the rediscovery of their ‘roots’ made them recognise the differences between their past and present selves and, in many cases, how they had grown apart from

their family history. Regarding this aspect she said, “[...] we visited the neighbourhood where I grew up and where my uncles live, and I went to visit my mom’s *rancho* [small locality] where my grandmother lives. That was when I realised that I am not from here, I do not belong here anymore, I do not fit in here. I understood what is to be *ni de aquí, ni de allá* [neither from here nor from there].” For some people, like David, despite their strong cultural orientation and relational bonds in Huaquechula, it was difficult for them to feel that they were welcomed and belonged to a place that had so little to offer in terms of opportunities and life satisfaction. For some others, like Nadia, who are highly skilled and educated, despite their relatively numerous opportunities in Mexico City, they do not have a strong cultural orientation and relational bonds in the country, therefore they feel Mexico is not where they belong nor where they want to be. In various ways, people’s wellbeing, sense of belonging as well as their life expectations are affected by their inability to (re)integrate.

As I enquired about migrants’ expectations of their lives in the USA and upon return, I also asked about their future life aspirations. As in the other moments (lives in the USA and upon return), the majority of participants’ expectations were related to improved wellbeing. Particularly, the need for an enhanced material wellbeing; having a stable financial situation to provide security and improved living conditions for themselves and their ‘loved ones’ resonated with most participants. This includes aspects such as affording higher education, private health care and, if possible, holidays for their children. Education in particular is highly valued by returnees as the only real avenue to obtain better employment and improve standards of living in Mexico (Montoya-Arce et al. 2011; Waddell and Fontanela 2015). For example, Janet (MC, 35) mentioned, “To be able to help my children with their education, give them the best I can. My most ambitious dream is to help my children go to university since it is the only way these days to do better here [Mexico]. That would be like winning the lottery.” Other participants were quite pessimistic about their future in Mexico: in the words of Tere (H, 48), “I am afraid we will be in a worse situation, the cost of living in Mexico is higher every day but our income remains the same. I am not sure we will be able to afford to have decent living conditions in some years from now.” Therefore, they had considered the possibility of re-migrating. This resonates with Porobić’s (2017) research findings, which suggest that obstacles to long-term stay in the country of origin are dissatisfaction with the standard of education, slow socio-economic progress, unemployment, and insecurity, particularly when it comes to the future of their children.

Concerning further migration movements, two-thirds of the participants mentioned that, if given the opportunity, they would like to relocate to another place. From this group, a few were interested in moving internally within the country (particularly from the rural site to bigger cities), in search of formal employment. Others, usually those who had access to education opportunities, were looking to re-migrate to a third country (e.g. Brazil, China, Germany or Spain), where they could find post-graduate programmes or other development opportunities. However, for the majority, the USA was still their desired destination. Some of the motivations for moving back to the USA were related to returnees' desire to be reunified with their family members left behind, particularly with their children. Nonetheless, for the vast majority, due to the disappointment experienced upon return, re-migrating to the USA continued to be seen as a livelihood improvement strategy worth pursuing.

Either because it was their original plan, or due to disappointment, some participants have re-migrated temporarily and some others have made unsuccessful attempts to do so. For example, due to their status as citizens, Arturo (MC, 36) and Patricia (MC, 38) have been back to the USA for short visits. Luis (MC, 32) and Nadia (MC, 35) were accepted into Master degree programmes and granted scholarships, therefore they spent one year in the USA and Europe, respectively, to complete their studies. Maria Luisa (MC, 64) was granted a visa as part of a cultural exchange promoted by a Mexican NGO and was able to travel to the USA twice to visit her children. With regard to those who have tried and failed to re-migrate, Elba (MC, 23) and Angeles' (MC, 62) visa applications were denied; Luis (H, 35), Pablo (H, 43) and Sandra (H, 40) were intercepted by USA authorities while trying to re-enter the USA without proper documents and were deported; and Moises (MC, 30) and Luis (H, 35) also attempted to cross the Mexico-USA border without documentation but, due to the conditions at the border, were unable to complete their journeys.

Despite the high number of participants interested in re-migrating, very few had concrete plans and opportunities to do so. In general, people's immobility was related to their reasons for return, for example being banned from re-entering the USA, family obligations such as the need to take care of their elderly parents or children, or having a business or property that tied them to their communities. Other reasons included lack of financial resources to pay for a smuggler, increased risks of crossing the border without documents, and an inability to fulfil USA visa requirements or access information regarding this process. 'Family reunification' is an interesting migration strategy identified among some participants that will require further research. In other words, returnees are looking forward to when their US-

born children become adults (at 21 years old according to USA immigration policy) as they will be able to re-enter the country in a documented fashion as an immediate relative of a US citizen.

7.3. Returnees' contributions to their communities of return

While the role of return migrants in the development of their 'home' countries has been studied by several authors (see Ammassari 2003; Ammassari and Black 2001; Kuschminder 2017, among others), this aspect is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, I will focus solely on what participants thought about returnees' potential contributions to their communities. When asked about returnees' potential contributions in this way, financial investments and the creation of jobs were the two main aspects that participants highlighted as their contribution to their local economies. As an example, Gilberto (MC, 53), who bought two taxis upon his return and was planning to open a business, said: "Many times when we start a new business, we create jobs. For example, I employed two drivers for the taxis and will need at least five people for my new business. Additionally, I cannot speak for everyone, but I think now we [returnees] understand the importance of paying taxes." While the impact of new business creation by return migrants can be significant in certain countries of return (see the case of India in Kuschminder 2017:43 and China in Demurger and Xu 2011), unfortunately, in the Mexican case returnees' contributions have not proved to be substantial.

Regarding human capital transfers, participants highlighted that, due to their enhanced work ethic and experience in the USA, they could contribute to increasing the productivity and efficiency at any work place, as well as introduce an innovative way of doing things. These are examples of what Levitt (1998) has termed 'social remittances'. Furthermore, participants commented that due to the civic culture adopted in the USA, returnees could contribute to their communities becoming cleaner, more organised and less corrupted. In this regard, Natalia (MC, 28) reflected:

We [returnees] have a different way of seeing things, the fact that you have seen other things gives you the chance of doing things differently. We [Mexican society] could do better if we just followed rules, paid taxes, payed for services, do things the right way. While in the USA, I learnt to do things in a way that works for you without affecting others. It would make us better as a society but also could help our country a lot. It would take several generations but maybe, eventually, we would have a government composed of people who respect others, the laws, and they do what they have to.

Additionally, participants considered that returnees could be key in the daunting task of making Mexican society a more inclusive one. Damián (MC, 23), among others, emphasised the need to create bridges between migrant and non-migrant communities and reduce prejudices against returnees. In his words, “we [returnees] could contribute to building a more equal society. For example, we could share our experiences with gender equality and our respect and appreciation for [cultural] diversity. Mexicans need to be less *machistas*, and stop being afraid of differences. They need to reduce their prejudices, they need to stop calling us *pochos*...” Similarly, Ricardo (MC, 36) spoke about the use of returnees’ experiences to support other returnees upon their arrival in Mexico, and in this way helping returnees to develop stronger support systems. In his words, “[...] supporting others who arrive after us, we have the experience so we could help them to navigate their new realities.” By doing this (bridging with the non-migrant community and supporting other returnees), returnees would build on their social capital by expanding and strengthening their networks, but more valuably by becoming agents of social change in a society where they remain highly invisible.

Unfortunately, returnees’ desire and potential to elicit major social contributions (social change) in the Mexican context does not mean that this will occur. As stated previously in the literature, despite migrants’ motivations and capital, conditions need to exist in the country of return that allow efficient investment of that capital (Ammassari and Black 2001:40). In this regard, as discussed in Chapter 6, we can conclude that Mexico lacks adequate policy and programmes with sufficient funds which could support returnees’ efforts to contribute to the development of their country. Furthermore, participants’ critical view on the government’s performance remains a significant obstacle. In the words of Valeria (MC, 61), “We could do many things, but if this government remains there [...] they will continue robbing us. To be able to make a real contribution we need a government which really wants to support its people.” When enquired about the potential role of the government in supporting their contributions, Paco (H, 37) said, “Overall, they [the government] need to acknowledge all we have done for the development of this country; while being there we send a lot of remittances and once here we bring ideas and set up new initiatives.” Furthermore, Joel (MC, 62) proposed, “The government’s work is to help migrants to optimise their resources by providing them with orientation and developing co-investing schemes for them.”

In addition to the contextual situation, authors have stressed that in order to contribute to social change and to occupy a position of power in their communities of return, return migrants require a diverse range of attributes including a positive attitude, financial resources, as well as personal and technical skills (Ammassari and Black 2001; Gmelch 1980; King 1986; Kuschminder 2017). Unfortunately, as has been highlighted throughout this research, a large number of participants demonstrated limited capacity, or willingness, to contribute to their communities. Their access to unskilled jobs while in the USA, the often compelled or forced nature of their return, their limited resources, and inability to make the ends meet upon return, became obstacles for them to (re)integrate and to contribute to their communities.

Despite these limitations being common in both sites, there are some differences between Huaquechula and Mexico City. The most interesting difference is the varying levels of awareness of their entitlement to rights as 'return migrants' and the positions of power that they held. While in Huaquechula, due to their work in the local government, several participants were in a position which could hypothetically allow a certain degree of leadership in developing positive change for returnees, however they did not take this opportunity. Participants had not developed a consciousness of their condition as returnees in a position of (relative) power, and had done nothing to challenge the status quo in their community of return. In contrast, professional returnees (mainly from the 1.5 generation) based in Mexico City were very aware of their rights and needs as returnees. Therefore, despite the limitations of not holding a position of power, they had better access to resources and were advocating to improve their situation back in Mexico, specifically with regard to access to education. These differences in the advocacy efforts of returnees may draw policy makers' attention and efforts towards a specific group of returnees, while the less skilled remain invisible to government officials and the rest of Mexican society.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to broaden our understanding of the (re)integration experiences of Mexican returnees using a multi-causal and multi-dimensional framework. Furthermore, in order to look beyond the functional aspects of (re)integration (which has been the main focus of the existing literature on the Mexican case), this research considers the nuances of the participants' current life satisfaction and overall wellbeing and identifies some differences between the case of men and women. At the same time, this broader analysis helps to better

explain the impact of the return and (re)integration experiences on returnees' sense of belonging and future aspirations.

Firstly, the analysis of the (re)integration process was focused on functional aspects of participants' lives in Mexico, such as access to official documentation and livelihoods, and their level of civic and political participation. Access to official documentation was generally identified as possible, yet problematic, especially for those who required documents from the USA to complete these procedures. For many of them, their undocumented status at 'home' had similar consequences to those they had during their experience in the host country (e.g. inability to access governmental services or formal employment). Regarding access to civic and political participation, this chapter highlighted that, despite relatively good access to the voting card, and an enhanced civic and political awareness, returnees still have very limited involvement in actual activities: according to their own accounts, even lower than that of non-migrants. The main obstacles to civic and political participation are the pressing need to survive, having a partial sense of belonging and, predominantly, an overall mistrust in the social and governmental system. In the rural site, in spite of the integration of some returnees into formal employment within the local government, their lack of awareness of their status as return migrants and their low-level job positions have limited their opportunity to support other returnees. Returnees' exclusion from the civic and political spheres contributes to their stagnation and invisibility.

Access to livelihood opportunities was highlighted as crucial to be able to (re)integrate into Mexican society. Despite the fact that the majority of the participants were economically active at the time of the interview, most were working in the informal sector and were struggling to fulfil their expectations of being able to provide a 'good enough life' for themselves and their families. Except for those working in call centres and the food industry, participants had very limited opportunities to transfer their skills gained while in the USA. When comparing their lives to those they had in Mexico prior to their departure, participants had an enhanced satisfaction of their standard of living. Key aspects for this upward mobility in the urban setting were education; for those in the rural site, financial investment in assets. My findings from 'non-traditional' states of migration contribute to the results previously obtained in other urban locations in traditional sending states. Through their studies conducted in Jalisco, Papail and Arroyo (2004) identified that returnees often achieve upward mobility through their use of human and financial capital gathered abroad to secure better jobs or to invest in the local markets. In contrast, when comparing their standard of

living with the one they had in the USA, most participants perceived that their current standard of living was lower. This is not only a consequence of their status as returnees, but is also related to the current socio-economic context in Mexico.

Secondly, the analysis of (re)integration experiences was focused on diverse aspects of returnees' lives, such as the development and/or re-establishment of social bonds and bridges, as well as the de- and re-construction of their cultural orientation and identification. In terms of social bonds (relational wellbeing), research findings revealed the crucial role that family relationships play in returnees' (re)integration due to the support that family can provide to the newcomers while they address their functional and psychosocial needs. Beyond the family network, in general, returnees had resumed some relationships with close friends or neighbours and developed some others, particularly with non-migrants. Returnees in the urban setting often developed social relationships in spaces such as work or school. For those in the rural site, these were developed mainly through family networks. In general, we can say that migrating at a young age, spending longer periods abroad and having been able to integrate into the mainstream society while in the USA, hindered returnees' ability to build social bonds back in Mexico. As an example, all 1.5 generation returnees who were unmarried at the time of return, have remained unmarried. The main reason behind this was the difficulties (specially for women and members of the 1.5 generation) in finding a spouse with whom they share a cultural background and life-style. And yet, contrary to what might be expected, the limited ability to develop bonds back in Mexico did not mean that participants had stronger bonds in the USA. Typically, people reported lack of time and the inability to have closer contact with their networks in the USA as two key aspects that would diminish their transnational connections, including with family members. Further relationship transformations were separations from spouses, primarily as a consequence of a problematic (re)integration process. Specific aspects affecting women were domestic violence and becoming single mothers.

Regarding cultural identification and orientation, while participants demonstrated that there is no uniform cultural identification among returnees, the majority still self-identified as Mexican. Some others self-identified with the local *gentilicio* (term referring to the natives or inhabitants of a particular place), some as hyphenated (Mexican-American) or *ni de aquí, ni de allá*, and others as migrants. Similarly, returnees' cultural orientation was identified as bidirectional. While they valued and missed cultural aspects from the USA (e.g. democracy, civility and work culture), they were able to value the local traditions, family values and other

social aspects of Mexican society and culture. Unfortunately, this bidirectionality was not well received in their return communities, where returnees are usually expected to behave as 'more Mexican and less American'.

In addition to the context of return and level of social support, emotional readiness and the ability to cope with the post-return experiences have been identified as key to an enhanced psychosocial wellbeing during the (re)integration process. For the wellbeing analysis, exploring the interconnections between life satisfaction, sense of belonging and long-term life expectations helped us to understand why a significant number of participants still considered re-migrating, either internally or internationally, as one of the few options to contribute to their ideal of *vivir mejor* (living well). Moreover, the inability of many returnees to re-migrate generates new challenges which affect their opportunities to (re)integrate and to contribute to their communities of return. This inability to re-migrate leaves many in a protracted limbo state which is detrimental, not just to their individual wellbeing, but also to the wellbeing of their families and entire communities. Finally, as we observed throughout this chapter, the gender dimension of (re)integration experiences contributes another level of complexity to this analysis, making it clear that there is a need for further research on how these experiences affect men and women's wellbeing differently.

8. Conclusions and ways forward

Every day thousands of people return to their countries of origin, and independently of their reasons of return or their intentions to remain, they begin a process of adjustment and incorporation to their localities and societies of return. Despite the scale of this return migration movement, our understandings of the (re)integration experience are still evolving, and this study has aimed at making a contribution to dissecting it. The purpose of this last chapter is to summarise the most important results of this study by discussing my key empirical findings of the Mexican case in the light of the questions outlined in Chapter 1, the theoretical debates raised, and the '(re)integration framework' proposed in Chapter 2. Hence the first and longer section of this chapter synthesises and interprets my main research results. In the second section, I discuss some policy implications, followed by a final section where I outline the strengths and weaknesses of this study and suggest some aspects that may require further research.

8.1. Interpretation of results

Three questions are central to this research: the first one aimed to explore the factors that shape return migrants' (re)integration experiences, and the second was related to returnees' own perception of their experiences. By answering these two first questions I will address the third one, by which this research aims to contribute to our understandings of how return migration and (re)integration happen in migrants' countries and localities of return.

At the outset of this thesis it was understood from the literature review that, while there are various approaches to understanding integration processes in general, and (re)integration specifically, there are few studies that have what I called a 'holistic' approach. Therefore, throughout this thesis I have argued that in order to improve our understanding of individuals' (re)integration processes and experiences, it is necessary to adopt a broader framework of analysis. Through the use of the '(re)integration framework' for the analysis of Mexican migrants' experience, set out diagrammatically in Figures 2 and 9, this study has contributed to strengthening the hitherto insufficient understanding of the multi-dimensional (re)integration process and its consequences. The proposed framework argues that migrants' sociodemographic characteristics and contexts of return, as well as their pre-return, return and post-return experiences shape and influence their (re)incorporation to their

home society which in turn has an impact on their overall wellbeing, sense of belonging and future aspirations.

According to Cerase (1974), contextual factors in countries of origin, and specific localities of return, need to be taken into account as a prerequisite to understanding the reasons why migrants emigrate and are able (or not) to (re)integrate back into their 'home' societies. For this reason, I adopted a multi-site approach looking at two contrasting localities of return. Masferrer and Roberts (2012) recommended for the Mexican context conducting qualitative research in non-traditional emigration areas with high levels of return migration to help understand the relationship between emigration and return, as well as the challenges for (re)incorporation upon return. Therefore, I gathered information in Huaquechula, Puebla and Mexico City, two non-traditional emigration locations with high levels of return. This approach was useful to build a broader understanding of how contextual aspects shape and influence the emigration, return and (re)integration experiences of migrants' differently. Differences in returnees' experiences in the two contrasting locations included age and reasons for emigration, duration of absence, the activities they engaged in while abroad, motivations/pressures and type of return, as well as socio-economic and cultural aspects in their communities of return.

Conducting research in two contrasting locations has helped to generate rich insights due to participants' diverse experiences. However, it is interesting that the richness of the information provided was not the same in the two locations. From the interviews, I found that participants in Mexico City were more willing to talk about their migration and (re)integration experiences and had devoted more thought to these issues than those from Huaquechula. This may be because of the differences in returnees' sociodemographic characteristics and the cultural aspects of their locations of return. About the former, returnees based in Mexico City presented higher levels of formal education and more political awareness of their condition as migrants, and therefore were more ready to talk about their experiences. Some of them even had previous experiences of sharing their life stories. By contrast, the participants in Huaquechula were less ready to identify themselves as returnees and openly talk about their experiences due to the conservative environment and the stigma attached to being a return migrant, and even worse, a deportee in that locality. It is also possible that my own positionality – as Mexico City-born researcher and as an 'outsider' to the rural context of Huaquechula – may have also influenced the differential readiness of the two sets of interviewees to respond to my questions.

For my methods of data collection, qualitative methodologies (in-depth interviewing) proved to be useful to comprehend migrants' objective experiences, as well as more personal and subjective aspects of their lives such as motivations and life-aspirations, decision-making processes and wellbeing. One of the major advantages of research that focuses on migrant experiences is precisely that it is migrant-centric, and it can provide relevant insights into their realities but also into how to modify problematic situations encountered. The research showed that each migration and (re)integration experience is unique and determined by various factors influenced by external circumstances and constraints as much as on individual factors. Nevertheless, the main thrust of the analysis has been towards careful generalisation rather than meticulous consideration of lots of individual cases (Ammassari 2003:264).

In relation to the factors that shape return migrants' (re)integration experience, this research confirmed that the (re)integration experience of returnees, as was anticipated in Chapter 2, is influenced by a wide range of factors. With regard to migrants' pre-return experiences, various factors assume particular importance in both migrants' integration in the USA and therefore their (re)integration in Mexico: motivations/pressures to migrate, the age at emigration, gendered life course, and the place of settlement. Contrary to what NELM theorists state, participants' emigration movement was motivated by far more complex aspects than financial ones. Some of this complexity and nuance was related to factors which were introduced as 'aspirations' but respondents also referred to them as 'pressures' to migrate. As the most common aspirations and/or pressures to migrate given by participants were to reunify with family members living in the USA and the need to financially support their families (back in Mexico) we can conclude that participants' incentives to migrate were highly motivated by their relational commitments and material needs.

Additionally, this research shows that gendered life course and place of settlement in the USA are also pre-return aspects that have a significant impact on returnees' experiences. Participants who migrated as children were found more likely to have been able to integrate into the host society due to their greater exposure to local institutions (schooling) making their experience richer and more diversified. Hence, migrants who were able to access formal schooling more often learnt the language, developed social bridges with the non-migrant community, and had a greater exposure to the local culture than those who arrived at an older age and their exposure to local institutions was limited to informal employment. When looking at the gendered life course aspect, it is worth highlighting that the younger

participants are at the time of their migration movement, there is a higher possibility that they have or will develop their most significant relations in the 'host' country. For example, children who were reunited with their parents (presumably the most significant relational bond they have), they tend to 'burn their bridges' in Mexico and be more invested towards their new lives in the USA. Conversely, men who migrated as (young) adults looking to fulfil their financial responsibilities as the main breadwinners of their household were more orientated towards their lives at 'home'. Place of settlement in the host country is another pre-return aspect that shapes migrants' integration and (re)integration experiences. There are two main reasons why this may happen. Firstly, it was shown that the fewer the number of migrants who were originally from the same community of origin that there were settled within a specific location, the more bridges participants built outside their social group, which in some cases implied a stronger need to learn the English language. Secondly, from the migrants' accounts it appeared that those who were located in communities with fewer migrants coming from the same locality of origin had more opportunity to diversify their work niches and have enhanced opportunities for professional advancement. We can conclude, then that the more migrants had the chance to participate in education and had access to better opportunities for professional development and develop relations outside their communities of origin, the more they felt integrated in their 'host' society. Hence, they felt more satisfied with their lives in the USA and were more likely to identify themselves in a hyphenated way.

The results of this thesis also corroborate those of empirical studies showing that the way (re)integration occurs depends largely on migrants' return motivations, preparedness and on the expectations of their post-return lives (Cassarino 2004; Cerase 1974; King 2000). These aspects were found to affect the satisfaction of migrants concerning their return move and also the way they dealt with constraints and opportunities after return. In the case of those who were not forced to return due to a so-called 'voluntary departure' order or a removal, evidence was generated showing that pull-factors tend to prevail over push-factors in return decision-making. For those who were 'pulled' back 'home', motivated by the idea of finding opportunities for their professional development (e.g. accessing higher education or starting a business), they were more likely to be satisfied with their (re)integration experience than those who returned compelled by their 'relational' commitments and needs. One reason for this was that the former tended to have an increased sense of ownership of their decision and consequently be better prepared both functionally and emotionally to

endure the hardships in their country or localities of return. Conversely, for the latter, their decision was often rushed by critical circumstances (e.g. illness) and taken based on others' needs; consequently they were ill-prepared both functionally and emotionally to endure the post-return hardships faced. This was the case of many women who were pushed back to Mexico due to their need to keep their families together, a role that they feel has been inescapably conferred upon them as wives and mothers.

About migrants' expectations of their post-return lives, this research confirmed that these are often influenced by their original emigration incentives, but more often by their lives in the host country and their return motivations/pressures. A common example of post-return expectations linked to migrants' emigration motivations is "the need to provide a 'good enough life' for my family." Some examples of post-return expectations linked to migrants' lives in their host country were access to higher education or wanting to enjoy life back in their communities of origin without being discriminated against. And some others related their return motivations to being able to take care of their 'loved ones' or "enjoying safety and freedom of being in one's country." The findings of this study show that, despite migrants' agency and resilience, the socio-economic environment, governmental policies, and the gendered roles and norms in the country and communities of return are often far more decisive for migrants' ability to fulfil their post-return expectations than the individual characteristics of migrants themselves. Specifically, differential access to economic opportunities and to institutional support, as well as discrepancies in the sociocultural environment and implementation of public policies in the places of return can further exacerbate existing inequalities between communities (rural vs. urban) as well as exclude certain population groups such as women, the elderly or unskilled workers. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of diverse levels of government jointly engaging in meaningful policy coordination (multilevel governance) to improve migrants' real opportunities of (re)integration regardless of their place of return and gender (Scholten and Penninx 2016:94).

Another relevant aspect revealed by the research is that migrants' (re)integration experience and wellbeing varies depending on the time that has passed since return and the type of return followed. In line with other studies (King 2000), I conclude, that, generally speaking, migrants face greater problems of (re)integration right after return, and then these progressively diminish. Nonetheless when analysing the nexus between time since returning and return motivations, I could identify differences among groups. Information from in-depth

interviews suggests that, for those who had the ability to decide and prepare for their return, their arrival was smoother due to more stable psychosocial and financial circumstances. For others with less ability to decide and prepare, the arrival was much more challenging, particularly with regard to psychosocial wellbeing. Returnees' wellbeing was often hampered by three key factors: the recurrence of family separation, the traumatic experience of being detained and deported, and the realisation of the great loss experienced. After this initial stage of arrival, there comes a readjustment phase where returnees try to secure employment or test the viability of their enterprises; re-establish or develop social networks; re-appraise the local context in the light of the changes that have occurred during their absence; and emotionally cope with their return and post-return experiences. As the more prepared returnees may have more resources immediately after arrival, these tend to be self-sufficient in this initial stage. It is mainly during the transition moment that they require more institutional and personal support. Those returnees who did not manage to prepare their return, tend to require more support for their arrival and subsequently. As they often lack immediate social networks to rely upon, some institutional support is crucial for them.

Research presented in this thesis also substantiates the notion that (re)integration is a dynamic and long-lasting process (Heckmann 2006:17). In other words, as time passes, and depending on individual, social and contextual characteristics and constraints, returnees' processes of (re)integration might face progression or regression. Furthermore, (re)integration dimensions are interdependent; experience in one domain may affect the other in a positive or negative way (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016; Spencer and Charsley 2016). An example of the dynamism of this process over time was given by Claudia (MC, 43). Four years after her arrival in Mexico, Claudia got divorced and moved from the rural community where she was living with her husband to Mexico City, where she was originally from. This move positively affected her (re)integration experience, particularly in the social and structural dimensions. Upon her arrival in her home city, Claudia was supported by her family (social dimension) who provided her with a place to live and helped with the care of her children. Due to this support, and her human capital (ability to speak English fluently), she had access to employment. Regarding the cultural and political dimensions, despite her strong identification as *Chilanga*, her struggles to survive in Mexico during the first years with no support from the government, had a negative impact in the latter (political) dimension making her feel very antagonistic about Mexican politics and its institutions. The acknowledgment of this interdependent and complex dynamic is crucial for

the development of a comprehensive understanding of the integration experiences underway and the possible consequences of these on returnees' wellbeing, their families and communities.

This leads us on to consider the second main question addressed by this study: How do migrants experience their (re)integration process? As suggested by Gmelch (1980), and reinforced more recently by Wright (2012), the life satisfaction of returnees depends on both objective, subjective and relational aspects. With regard to the former, as Claudia's interview excerpt illustrates, (re)integration is very much conditioned by having a positive post-return experience in the structural and social dimensions. Returnees who had access to key institutions such as education and the job market, and who were able to establish meaningful and supportive networks, showed higher levels of satisfaction in their (re)integration process. Participation in these two dimensions has been found to have a significant effect on migrants' experiences in other domains including the cultural and civic and political arenas. These findings corroborate others of previous empirical research which highlight how participation in the labour market influences migrants' experiences in other dimensions including the cultural domain (Özdemir et al. 2004 in Spencer and Charsley 2016). In other words, (re)integration appears to be a staged process where progress in some dimensions can lead to, or prevent, success in others; the most relevant being those dimensions which provide returnees with the opportunity to earn a living and provide psychosocial support.

As for wellbeing, it appears that, on balance, returnees considered being quite satisfied when comparing their current lives with the ones they had before emigrating, but quite dissatisfied when comparing them with those they had while in the 'host' country. As an example, when comparing her current life satisfaction with the ones she had before leaving Mexico and while in the USA, Claudia said:

I think I have a better life now than the one I had before leaving [Mexico]. Life was not very promising for me, I could only imagine myself getting married at a very young age and staying at home as a housewife. I now have a great life experience. I can say I travelled, found love, had my children, and learnt about what I am capable of [referring to her professional development]. But when comparing it [my life] to the one I had in the USA, I feel quite unhappy. My life has taken a 360° turn. The deportation of my husband not only represented losing my entire life in the USA, my business, my house, my car, my friends and who I was... but also my husband and my children's future.

As Claudia highlights, upon return many returnees experience great losses such as their material possessions, social networks, significant relationships, sense of identity and future

aspirations. These losses deeply affect their overall wellbeing. When migrants are unable to cope with their losses and face adverse post-return circumstances like the inability to find employment or access governmental services, it is more likely that they will experience a deterioration of their material wellbeing which in turn will influence their relational wellbeing, sense of belonging (psychosocial wellbeing) and future aspirations (Lietaert et al. 2017). Furthermore, I argue that when it comes to the definition of future aspirations, it is likely that returnees will aspire to re-migrate. This resonates with Porobić's (2017) research findings, who states that obstacles to a long-term stay for returnees in the country of origin are lack of opportunities of (re)integration, but particularly the inability to fulfil their expectation of providing a better future for their children. As a result of their deteriorated wellbeing with their (re)integration experiences and life expectations, two-thirds of my research participants were interested in re-migrating either within Mexico or internationally. Therefore, the study of the characteristics of returnees, the nature of their return, as well as their (re)integration experiences has proved to be relevant not only to understanding the impact return is having on individuals but also in re-shaping and perpetuating their migration aspirations.

Regarding returnees' possible contributions to their localities of return, this research has demonstrated that, in order to elicit major contributions, conditions need to exist in their country of return that allow efficient investment of their human, financial, social and political capital (Ammassari and Black 2001:40). Therefore, primarily small-scale contributions have been identified for the case of Mexican returnees. In the private sphere, many contributions are done on a day-to-day basis. After return, some migrants have become key providers of financial and psychosocial support to members of their family, for example their elderly parents. Regarding their workplaces and social circles, returnees instigate positive changes in attitudes and behaviour by promoting values of respect for diversity. Regarding the public sphere, an important contribution has been the start-up of family businesses which has generated some employment and contributed to local economies. Contributions in Mexico City included the participation of a small, but significant, number of returnees in the development of some associations or organisations, and in advocacy activities regarding issues such as equal access to rights. An interesting finding of this research is that despite several returnees' posts in the local government of Huaquechula, they have not promoted the generation of any initiatives in favour of returnees.

8.2. Policy implications

First of all it seems relevant to reaffirm that given the current context in the USA characterised by a radical anti-immigration approach, return migration to Mexico is likely to continue at rise. Moreover, despite return often being considered as one possible step in a sequence of multiple movements (King 2000), return for Mexican undocumented migrants can hardly be viewed as temporary due to their difficulties re-entering to the USA, resulting in a situation of 'involuntary immobility' (Carling 2002). Therefore, creating an appropriate policy framework and promoting better conditions for return must be made a priority to facilitate migrants' (re)integration in the country of origin, but especially in their localities of return. These efforts imply coordinating actions with actors and institutions across vital areas for (re)integration such as education, health care, and welfare. There is little doubt that, if return migrants encountered fewer readjustment problems, they would be readier to return. And they would experience higher levels of wellbeing and would not feel compelled to re-migrate.

Countries and particularly localities of return must assume the role that they themselves and the local population play in the (re)integration process. Taking into account the discrepancies between the current (re)integration policy frames, measures, and practices in Mexico, I thus advocate for a robust, comprehensive national integration policy, but especially for an adequate infrastructure to implement it. In order to be able to ensure actions are taken, I recommend the possibility of giving the PEM a binding character and therefore a budget allocated to it for its real implementation. Perhaps the best next step would be the creation of an independent entity (e.g. a national migrants' affairs office) to oversee, develop, and coordinate migrants' (immigrants, refugees and returnees) integration among federal departments and across levels of government. The office would serve also as the inter-agency liaison to all major federal, state, local, civil society and private sector stakeholders.

Some scholars argue that local policies are more likely than national policies to be accommodating towards ethnic diversity and work together with migrant organisations, due in part to the practical need to manage ethnic differences in a specific locality (Borkert et al. 2007; Vermeulen and Stotijn 2010). Moreover, more and more relations are developing between host and 'home' countries at the local level, through local authorities on both sides and through migrant organisations (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016:199). This calls for the need from local authorities in Mexico to reach out transnationally to local authorities in the USA to develop collaboration initiatives: for example, to help to better prepare

migrants' return, to develop investment and cooperation initiatives, to help returnees to obtain any kind of documents once they are back, or to promote their family reunification when needed. The extent and nature of local-to-local projects and relationships are very much dependent on policies and available funding opportunities, but particularly on political will within localities of return.

A particularly relevant measure that could facilitate (re)integration and enhance its positive implications is the creation of conditions in which returnees can more easily become incorporated into Mexico's institutions and economic life. Currently programmes and policies have been too narrowly focused on assisting deportees upon their arrival, leaving a large group of returnees and their longer-term needs largely unattended. This study has shown that returnees' long-term access to institutions and programmes has been meaningful in many ways. One aspect that therefore needs to be looked at by policy-makers and service providers is what needs to be done to support such access and to ensure longer-term support for all returnees and their families. When it comes to returnees' economic reincorporation, this study has found that a very relevant aspect influencing their individual success in the rural site is their ability to invest their financial capital in successful and safe ventures, and for people in the urban site to be able to transfer their foreign work experience. Returnees' wellbeing could be significantly improved if they were supported to be economically active because, as was confirmed through this research, they are more able to provide for their families and achieve the professional development desired.

The research has confirmed that the more changes a returnee has gone through, the more they feel it is difficult to develop or re-establish social relations back 'home'. But it has also been clarified that the rejection is not exclusively experienced by returnees; this is a characteristic of Mexican society where the construction of the Mexican national identity is influenced by the incorporation of a conflictual coexistence of sympathy and rejection of the 'other'. It appears crucial then to find ways to highlight the richness of Mexico's diverse population and to acknowledge the Mexican-American (bi-cultural) heritage as part of it. Moreover, it should be recommended to promote the normalisation of the presence of returnees in the country, as well as help returnees themselves to develop awareness of their needs and new condition, and help them to find ways to challenge their status quo in their communities of return. Based on these proposals it can be highly recommended to strengthen the relationships amongst returnees, and between returnees and non-migrants, so that their efforts can be combined, for example when advocating for common needs (e.g.

full access to irrigation water or embarking on a business venture). Simultaneous to these efforts, it is recommended to reinforce the use of existing anti-discriminatory policy measures in order to promote a culture of zero tolerance to any kind of harassment and discrimination against returnees or any other migrant.

This research has placed special emphasis on the relevance of returnees' (objective, subjective and relational) wellbeing as this is a key aspect that shapes not just their (re)integration experience but also their sense of belonging and their future aspirations. Based on the manifold stresses that returnees experience upon return, as reported by this research, we can conclude that this aspect has not been treated as a priority by policy makers. When putting together migration with wellbeing, it exposes the human rights deficit of migration systems and discourses, especially in the case of undocumented migrants (Gough and McGregor 2007). Therefore as much as wellbeing consequences of the return and (re)integration processes are very personal aspects of migrants' experiences, states should not neglect them. Individual efforts should be paired with a gradual building of integration projects and towards communities being better equipped and prepared for their reception and (re)integration. Policies should therefore offer sustained instrumental (material assistance), informative (advice and guidance) and psychosocial support all throughout return migrants' lengthy process of (re)integration.

8.3. Critical observations and directions for further research

Last but not least, the main strengths and weaknesses of this study, as well as recommendations for further research will be addressed. At the methodological level there are three aspects worth commenting on. Firstly, in contrast with other studies, this thesis does not look specifically at one type of return, life stage or gender group. Instead, I look at a group of returnees that cuts across all these categories. Focusing on this wide group has contributed to making visible the multiple reasons why migrants return to Mexico and the diversity of their profiles. Secondly, my study focuses on two non-traditional localities of emigration with contrasting characteristics, one rural and one urban. By covering these two sites, I achieved a better understanding of the relevance that contextual geographical aspects and its structural constraints have in shaping migrants' trajectories and particularly, their (re)integration experiences. Thirdly, this research has the aim of overcoming the simplistic approach of focusing on one single dimension of integration. Therefore, in this thesis I propose the use of the '(re)integration framework' as a 'integral' approach which

encompasses the analysis of five domains, plus sociodemographic characteristics of returnees and contextual aspects. This has allowed the research to bring into focus a number of structural, economic, social, political, cultural and subjective factors which condition the basic relationships between variables and help to appreciate the complexity of the process and the research analysis. A downside of this multi-causal, multi-site and multi-dimensional, approach is that I was not able to get a deeper understanding of the experiences of a particular group or domain, and neither was I able to spend as much time in each site as I felt I needed to get more in-depth nuances from my participants' experiences.

This thesis could be built upon further by moving in three different directions. First, it would be interesting to look at a specific group of returnees (e.g. US-born children (second generation), documented returnees, women, elderly or highly skilled migrants) in one single locality of return and focus on their experience in all dimensions. Second, it could also be relevant to conduct research in other contexts of return, perhaps in locations in those traditional states of emigration with similarities to the locations of this study. For example extending fieldwork to a city such as Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco, and a rural locality with high intensity of return migration such as Jiquilpan. This would provide an opportunity to compare the experiences of returnees in contrasting contexts of return and confirm Masferrer and Roberts hypothesis that differences in the place of migration (e.g. traditional and non-traditional), and particularly economic performance at a local level, influence return patterns (2012:475). Third, continuing to build on research carried out in Mexico City could be valuable, thereby expanding the scope of the research to look at other capital cities in Central America or other developing countries which are also receiving significant numbers of returnees.

This study has two main important limitations. The first one is that, despite integration being a bi-directional process, the information about migrants' (re)integration process was mainly obtained directly from returnees. For sure, gathering information from key informants and the participation of non-migrants in the focus groups conducted in Huaquechula, has helped to overcome this constraint and to cross-validate results. It would have been good if this research could have incorporated the voices of an increased number of non-migrants. But doing this by means of interviews with family members, colleagues, service providers and neighbours would have caused logistical and time-management problems which, within the present research framework and timetable, could not be tackled. However, in future

studies related to this subject, it may perhaps be useful to gather the viewpoints of a series of non-migrants in order to ascertain their perspectives on return migrants' experiences of (re)integration, how they assess their current wellbeing, and how they contribute to it.

The second limitation is that, despite the fact that gender has had a key role in the motivations to migrate and return, as well as in the integration and (re)integration experiences of my research participants, I have been unable to analyse this aspect in full detail. A way forward would be to unpack gender aspects such as practices and perceptions of masculinity and femininity among return migrants and analyse their intersections with place of return and life course. By doing this we would be able to have a deeper understanding of how this aspect affect both men's and women's experiences.

The analysis of returnees' contributions to the development of their 'home' countries is beyond the scope of this thesis. It would surely make an engaging contribution to the migration and development literature to do fieldwork in Mexico to evaluate the multiple contributions that returnees are able to make through the transfer of their financial, human, political and social capital and to evaluate the impact of such transfers. Temporally, it would be useful to carry on research in a longitudinal fashion to see how time plays a role in this process and hence to better understand when support is most needed as well as what kind of support would be suitable in each case. Another approach could be to compare in a more statistically rigorous way than I have done here, a set of undocumented returnees with a set of documented ones and analyse if this aspect influences differently migrants' assets and contributions to their communities of return.

This study illustrates that the return, falsely conceptualised as single motivated and unproblematic since individuals are seen to relocate, or are relocated to, the place where it is alleged they 'naturally belong', is simplistic and is highly problematic from the standpoint of the wellbeing of migrants and their communities. For those interested in Mexican return migration more specifically, I draw together information from the existing literature on Mexican returnees with my own empirical materials. In doing so, I build upon previous studies of returnees by looking close to their motivations/pressures to return, understanding their intersections with their lives in the USA, sociodemographic characteristics, gendered life course, structural constraints and future aspirations; and illustrate some of the effects of their type of return in their (re)integration experiences. For those interested in issues of migrant integration, this research adds to a growing body of literature that argues that (re)integration is a multi-dimensional, dynamic and long-term process. The way in which a

returnee experiences their process in one dimension will affect the others. In making these arguments, I expand the empirical base by bringing in a case study from non-traditional states of migration which are understudied.

My qualitative research presented in this thesis clearly unveils the paradoxes of the return and (re)integration experiences by pinpointing the contextual challenges and structural constraints that 'home' countries and localities represent for migrants, the aspects that promote and prevent their (re)integration in the various dimensions; but also, the use of agency and how they develop resilience. The disregard of states towards migrants' wellbeing shows the need to continue creating evidence centred on migrants' experiences. By doing this, researchers can help to create proof of how inadequate conditions of return and (re)integration have long-term consequences on the lives of individuals, with implications that are not only economic, but social and psychosocial as well. This requires that we continue to invest in understanding migrants' views and experiences by undertaking longitudinal and multiple studies and the using these for the development of better policies which could contribute to the improvement of returnees' human rights in Mexico and to become closer to their life aspiration of *vivir mejor*.

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Appendix one – Authorisation from local authority to conduct research



HUAQUECHULA
Administración 2014 - 2018
Gobierno que Construye

DEPENDENCIA: PRESIDENCIA MUNICIPAL
 SECCIÓN: ATENCIÓN AL MIGRANTE
 ASUNTO: EL QUE SE INDICA

A QUIEN CORRESPONDA
P R E S E N T E

El que suscribe **C. Ing. Pedro Avendaño Pérez, Director de la Oficina de Atención al Migrante del H. Ayuntamiento del Municipio de Huaquechula, Puebla;** por medio del presente le envío un cordial saludo y al mismo tiempo le informo que la portadora del presente **C. Lorena Guzmán Elizalde** quien se identifica con credencial para votar (IFE) con clave de elector GZELLR78012909M000 y credencial de la Universidad de Sussex, se encuentra en nuestro Municipio realizando un trabajo de investigación sobre el tema titulado "Retorno a México: explorando la experiencia de (re) integración a México". Dicha investigación (entrevistas) es para su trabajo de titulación para obtener su grado de Doctorado, estudios que está realizando en la Universidad de Sussex en el Reino Unido.

Esperando contar con su valioso apoyo en la entrevista, quedo a sus apreciables órdenes.

ATENTAMENTE
Huaquechula Puebla, a 13 de Mayo de 2015



Ing. Pedro Avendaño Pérez
Dirección de la Oficina de
Atención del Migrante



DIRECCIÓN DE ATENCIÓN
AL MIGRANTE
HUAQUECHULA, PUE.
2014 - 2018

c.c.p. Lic. Angélica A. Alonso Coria, Secretaria General del H. Ayuntamiento de Huaquechula, Puebla.
c.c.p. archivo.

 **Pedro Avendaño**
 e-mail: reclutamiento2014@gmail.com

Appendix two – Questionnaire survey

‘Return to Mexico: Exploring the (re)integration experience’

1. Have you ever lived in the USA?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Do you know any other person who lived in the USA and is now living in Mexico?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2.1. Can you describe how are you related to this person? (e.g. friend, sister in law, brother, etc)

3. Now I will ask questions about your or the person's (relative/close friend/acquaintance) migration experience. For how long you/this person have been back in Mexico?

☐ Less than a year ☐ 1 – 3 years ☐ 4 – 6 years ☐ More than 6 years

3.1. For how long you/this person lived in the USA?

☐ Less than a year ☐ 1 – 3 years ☐ 4 – 6 years ☐ More than 6 years

3.2. What are the reasons why you/this person is back in Mexico?

3.3. Where do you/this person currently live in Mexico? (state and municipality)

4. In case the person lived at least 3 years in the USA, have at least 1 year back in Mexico and currently live in Mexico City or Puebla ask, are you interested in being contacted for an interview?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4.1. Request for contact details:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Date:

Place:

ID: /300

Appendix three – Semi-structured in-depth interview schedule

The following is my interview schedule. I did not always follow the order religiously leaving room for each participant's narrative style and rhythm, but always aimed to complete it.

'Return to Mexico: Exploring the (re)integration experience'

Bio data

1. Where were you born?
2. Where do you currently live? (City/county/municipality)
3. What languages you speak?
 - 3.1. What language you feel most comfortable using?
4. Do you have any other nationality than the Mexican? Yes ☐ No ☐
 - 4.1. Which?
5. Do you currently have a partner? Yes ☐ No ☐
 - 5.1. Where was your partner born?
 - 5.2. Where does your partner currently live?
6. Do you have children? Yes ☐ No ☐
 - 6.1. How many?
 - 6.2. Where were your children born?
 - 6.3. Where do your children currently live?

With support of this time line, I would appreciate if you can share with me all your migration experiences, both national and international.

Previous migration movements

The following questions aim to understand your migration experience, or in case you have more than one, the last one which lasted at least 3 years:

7. When did you leave to the USA? (Month and year)
 - 7.1. Age
8. What were your reasons/motivations to migrate?
 - 8.1. Could you prioritise your reasons/motivations to migrate?
9. What were the conditions of your trip to the USA? (Include transit and arrival)
 - 9.1. How did you pay for your trip to the USA?
10. What were the expectations you had in relation to your life in the USA before your arrival?
 - 10.1. Do you consider your expectations changed upon your arrival?
Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐
 - 10.2. In what way?

11. What were the reasons for you to remain in the USA?

About your stay and integration process in the USA,

12. For how long did you live in the USA?

13. Where did you live during those years? (State (s), county (s))

13.1. In what conditions did you live during those years in the USA? (Living arrangements)

14. Did you manage to obtain any documents/regularisation during your stay in the USA?

Yes ☐ No ☐

14.1. Make a list of the documents you had and those you were missing.

Fake

Original

14.2. Please explain the reasons why you did not obtain the documents missing.

14.3. Do you consider that having obtained these documents or the lack of them facilitated or hindered your life while in the USA? Facilitated ☐ Hindered ☐

14.4. Explain.

15. What was your occupation status and main activities in the USA?

16. What kind of relations did you develop while in the USA?

16.1. While in the USA, how do you consider your relations were with people of your own community both, back in Mexico and in the USA?

17. While in the USA, did you have any civic or political participation either in Mexico or in the USA? e.g. Membership in institutions, activism, at a personal level through voting in elections or as a representative. Yes ☐ No ☐

17.1. Explain

18. At that time with what community and culture did you identify with?

19. Do you consider that you managed to integrate to the USA society? Yes ☐ No ☐

19.1. Explain

19.2. What helped/hindered to achieve this?

20. What do you consider are the positive results of your life in the USA?

20.1. What do you consider are the negative results of your life in the USA?

20.2. Looking back, how did you feel during the years that you lived in the USA?

21. Did you have any access to services or received any benefits from the USA or Mexican Government while living in the USA? e.g. Access to education, scholarships, health insurance, housing benefits, etc.

USA Government Yes ☐ No ☐

Mexican government Yes ☐ No ☐

21.1. Which?

21.2. Did you have any access to other support organisations (e.g. civil, political, religious) either Mexican or from the USA?

USA Yes ☐ No ☐

Mexican Yes ☐ No ☐

21.3. Which?

Return experience and place of return

About your return to Mexico:

22. When did you return to Mexico? (month and year)

22.1. Age

22.2. Years in Mx

23. Previous to your return, when was the last time you were in Mexico? (month and year)

24. What were your reasons/motivations to return?

24.1. Could you prioritise your reasons/motivations to return?

24.2. In case you are not original from Huaquechula/Mexico City, why did you decide to move here?

25. What were the conditions of your return trip? (include transit and arrival)

25.1. How did you pay your trip to Mexico?

26. Did you have the chance to prepare in advance for your return?

Yes ☐ No ☐

26.1. In which way?

26.2. For how long were you able to prepare?

27. What was the reaction of your significant people of your return?

27.1. Did any of your family members return with you? Yes ☐ No ☐

27.2. Who?

27.3. Did any significant person to you remain in the USA? Yes ☐ No ☐

27.4. Who?

27.5. Why did these people remain in the USA?

27.6. How does this affect you?

27.7. Did you know any friends or family members who returned to Mexico before you?

Yes ☐ No ☐

27.8. Who?

27.9. Would you consider that the return of these people influenced yours?

Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐

27.10. How?

28. What were your life expectations before your return to Mexico?

28.1. Do you consider your expectations changed upon your arrival?

Yes ☐ No ☐

28.2. In what way?

28.3. What are your expectations now?

29. What are the reasons of your stay in Mexico?

29.1. On what basis are you in Mexico?

Permanent ☐ Temporary ☐ Intermittent ☐ Other ☐

30. In your opinion who are the people who return regarding their characteristics? e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic background and occupation.

30.1. Why do these people return?

30.2. Why others do not return?

Reintegration experience

About your stay/integration process in Mexico:

31. Have you lived in a different place upon your arrival to the country? (State, municipality).

Yes ☐ No ☐

31.1. In what conditions have you lived upon your return to Mexico? (living arrangements)

32. Have you managed to obtain any documents upon your arrival?

Yes ☐ No ☐

32.1. Make a list of the documents you have and those you are missing.

32.2. Please explain the reasons why you have not obtained the documents missing.

32.3. Do you consider that having obtained these documents or the lack of them facilitated or hindered your life in Mexico? Facilitated ☐ Hindered ☐

32.4. Explain.

33. How do you currently earn your living? e.g. employment, self-employment, remittances, government support, savings, other.

33.1. Can you breakdown your sources of income in percentages for me please?

33.2. What have been all your occupations upon your arrival?

33.3. Do you consider your current occupation has any relation with your occupation in the USA?

Yes ☐ No ☐

33.4. How is it related?

33.5. Is there anything you have gained abroad that is relevant for earning your living in Mexico? Yes ☐ No ☐

33.6. What? Savings ☐ Experience ☐ Studies ☐ Networks ☐ Other ☐

33.7. Have you come across any obstacles in utilising what you have gained abroad?

Yes ☐ No ☐

33.8. If so, please tell me about these the obstacles

33.9. In relation to the labour market, do you think being a returnee gives you any advantage / disadvantage to find a job? Advantage ☐ Disadvantage ☐

33.10. Explain

33.11. How does your current standard of life you can afford compare with the one you enjoyed while in the USA? Much higher than before ☐ Higher than before ☐

Not much change ☐ Lower than before ☐ Much lower than before ☐

33.12. Explain

33.13. How does the current standard of life you can afford compare with that of other people here in Mexico who have a similar situation to yours but have never migrated?

Much higher ☐ Higher ☐ Not much different ☐ Lower ☐

Much lower ☐

33.14. Explain

33.15. How do you consider your consumption pattern (e.g. expenditures for clothes, leisure, travel, education of children, etc.) is in comparison to that of people in similar situation to yours but who have never migrated?

Much higher ☐ Higher ☐ Not much different ☐ Lower ☐

Much lower ☐

33.16. Explain

33.17. Do you have any property? Yes ☐ No ☐

33.18. What?

34. What kind of close relationships have you resumed/developed since your arrival to Mexico?

34.1. How are your social interactions at a local level in a daily basis since your arrival to Mexico? e.g. with other returnees, non-migrants, relatives, friends.

34.2. In what way do you keep these contacts?

34.3. How are your social interactions with people in the USA in a daily basis since your arrival to Mexico? e.g. with other migrants, non-migrants.

34.4. In what way do you keep these contacts?

34.5. In an average week, who do you spend more time with people locally or in the USA?

34.6. In regard to your current relationships with family members /family dynamics, are these any different to how they were before returning? e.g. children, partner, parents, siblings.

35. Do you have any civic or political participation either in Mexico or in the USA at the moment? e.g. Membership in institutions, activism, at a personal level through voting in elections or as a representative. Yes ☐ No ☐

35.1. Explain

35.2. Do you consider there are any differences between the political participation between return migrants and non-migrants? Yes ☐ No ☐

35.3. What are these differences?

36. With what community and culture do you identify the most at the moment?

36.1. How would you identify yourself currently?

Mexican ☐ Mexican-American ☐ American ☐ Migrant ☐

36.2. What do you miss most of the cultural practices of the USA?

36.3. What do you appreciate most among the cultural practices you found back in Mexico upon your return?

37. Overall, do you think being a returnee gives you any advantage/disadvantage in comparison to the non-migrants?

Advantage ☐ Disadvantage ☐ Non ☐

37.1. Explain

38. How do you consider your emotional/mental state at the moment?

Much better than before ☐ Better than before ☐ Not much change ☐

Worse than before ☐ Much worse than before ☐

38.1. Explain

38.2. How would you consider your physical health at the moment?

Much better than before ☐ Better than before ☐ Not much change ☐

Worse than before ☐ Much worse than before ☐

38.3. Explain

39. Compared with your life before migrating, how would you consider your life at the moment?

Much better than before ☐ Better than before ☐ Not much change ☐

Worse than before ☐ Much worse than before ☐

39.1. Explain

39.2. Compared with your life in the USA, how would you consider your life at the moment? Much better than before ☐ Better than before ☐

Not much change ☐ Worse than before ☐ Much worse than before ☐

39.3. Overall, how do you feel about being back in Mexico?

40. Do you think some people who return are more able to reintegrate than others?

Yes ☐ No ☐

40.1. If yes, what do you think are the reasons for this?

Role of authorities and local governance structures and its contribution to the reintegration of returnees.

41. Have you received any help upon your return to Mexico? Yes ☐ No ☐

41.1. If yes, from who have you received this help? e.g. individuals, non-profit organisations, governmental institutions, etc.

42. Are you familiar with the government's policy regarding return migrants?

Yes ☐ No ☐

42.1. Explain

42.2. Are you familiar with any governmental programme available for return migrants?

Yes ☐ No ☐

42.3. Which?

43. Have you accessed any Mexican governmental programmes or services while in Mexico?

Yes ☐ No ☐

43.1. Which?

43.2. Have you accessed any USA governmental programmes or services while in Mexico?

Yes ☐ No ☐

43.3. Which?

43.4. How important have these programmes been for you?

44. How has been the treatment that you received by service providers while accessing the services?

44.1. Based on your experience, would you say you feel confident when approaching an institution, you will receive the services you are in need of?

Yes ☐ No ☐

44.2. Explain

45. Based on your experience, how do you think returnees could be better supported by the local or federal governments?

46. If you could go back in time, would you make the same decision to leave Mexico to the USA?

Yes ☐ No ☐

46.1. Explain

47. If you could go back in time/could have chosen, would you still return to Mexico?

Yes ☐ No ☐

47.1. Explain

48. What do you see yourself doing in three years' time?

48.1. Are you planning to migrate again?

Yes ☐ No ☐

48.2. Explain

49. What do you think is the impact of return on migrants and their communities?

49.1. What do you think is the potential role of return migrants in their home societies and economies?

50. Would you like to add anything that you consider relevant for this research?

For statistical reasons I will appreciate if you can share the following information:

Date of birth:

Marital status:

Age:

Religion:

Current level of education:

Number of dependents and nationalities:

Email address:

Date:

Place:

Point of contact:

Start time:

End time:

Time total:

Name interviewee:

ID: /60

Comments:

Appendix four – Key informant interview guide

The following is an example of the interview guide used in my meetings with key informants (this particular one was used with authorities from the ministry of health). After conducting some desk research on the institution in turn, I modified the set of questions accordingly. Unlike the case of migrants' semi-structured in-depth interview schedule, I was very flexible in the use of this guide since the interview relied heavily on the interviewee.

'Return to Mexico: Exploring the (re)integration experience'

1. Can you share with me some of the history behind the creation of the Módulos de Atención a Migrantes Repatriados?
2. What are the main challenges/success stories in the implementation of Módulos de Atención a Migrantes Repatriados?
3. What would need to happen to overcome the challenges?
4. Do you consider you have enough resources to implement the programme efficiently?
5. What are the main partners in the implementation of the programme?
6. Are there any foreseen modifications to the programme?
7. What would you consider is the impact of these actions in the lives of returnees?
8. Have you identified any common health characteristics of returnees?
9. How do you think return migrants impact in their home countries/communities and economies?
10. Do you think some migrants are more able to reintegrate than others? If yes, what do you think are the reasons for this?
11. In your opinion, what are the main challenges/successful stories of the implementation of the PEM 2014-2018?
12. Which would you say are the key actors (lobbying, decision makers and implementers) promoting the right implementation?
13. Would you like to add anything that might be relevant for this research?

Appendix five – Research information sheet



'Return to Mexico: Exploring the (re) integration experience'

The aim of this short document is to introduce you the research project 'Return to Mexico: Exploring the (re) integration experience' conducted by the researcher Lorena Guzman Elizalde. This research is part of her doctoral studies on Migration at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom. This study is being funded by the Mexican National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT).

The aim of this research is to explore the reintegration process that migrants experience after returning from the United States to Mexico. As part of the methodology I will conduct interviews with migrants, as well as with members and representatives of the community and government.

The final goal of this research is to provide evidence of the different aspects which influence the return and the current life conditions of those who come back. This study will inform policy makers, organisations and migrants, and could be used to improve the conditions in which return and reintegration happen.

In case you agree in participating in this project, I am proposing to conduct an individual interview in which we will talk about your migration experience, focusing in your return to Mexico. This interview can be conducted in the place and time most convenient for you and will take around 2 hours. It is important to mention that all information you provide will remain strictly confidential as your name or any personal details will not be incorporated in the final document produced, unless you request the contrary. This information will be analysed along with other sixty interviews and published in a doctoral thesis as well as in academic articles.

Your participation in this study is very important due to your valuable personal experience. In case you accept participating in this research, I will be grateful if you can share your contact details so I can shortly contact you. Thank you very much for your support and participation in this study!

Sincerely,

Lorena Guzman Elizalde
Doctoral researcher

contact us

Lorena Guzman Elizalde
Researcher

Sussex Centre for Migration Studies
University of Sussex, Brighton
BN1 9SP, United Kingdom

l.guzman-elizalde@sussex.ac.uk

Appendix six – Participants' consent form



CONSENT FORM – PARTICIPANTS

I agree to take part in the 'Return to Mexico: Exploring the (re) integration experience' research project. I confirm that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I confirm I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part in this research means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher for around 2 hours,
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required,
- Allow the interview to be audio recorded.

I authorise that the information provided can be used under the following conditions:

- All the information provided can only be used for the purpose of academic research and its dissemination products,
- All the information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential and, in case I request so, all my personal details will be changed in order to guarantee anonymity at all times:

I request my personal data to be changed Yes ☐ No ☐

Place and date

Signature

CONSENT FORM – RESERCHER

I confirm that for the purposes of this study 'Return to Mexico: Exploring the (re) integration experience':

1. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time and if so, all information provided will be destroyed and removed from the project,
2. Information provided will only be used for the purpose of academic research and its dissemination products,
3. Particulars and names mentioned by participants will be changed in those cases when it was requested,
4. Privacy regulations according to the UK Data Protection Act 1998 will be observed.

For comments and/or questions related to this project do not hesitate in contacting me through the following e-mail: I.guzman-elizalde@sussex.ac.uk

Appendix seven – Timeline examples

The following is the timeline developed for Luis (H, 35) case. From his timeline we can observe that he had an initial short migration experience in the state's capital for around six months. After that he travelled to New York for five years. Due to a family emergency (mother illness), he came back shortly in 2003 for four months. He went back to the USA to keep working and contribute to his mother treatment. He came back in 2005 to spend the last days with his mother. After her death he went back to the USA for two years, this time to Miami, and came back to Mexico in 2007. He tried re-migrating in 2014 (X), but he was apprehended and deported back to Mexico.

1997	1998		2003	2003		2004	2005	2007	2015
6 months	3 months	5 yrs	4 months	9 months	1 year	2 yrs		X	
Huaque to Puebla	Puebla to Huaque	Huaque to NY	NY to Huaque	Huaque to NY	NY to Huaque	Huaque to Miami	Huaque to Miami	Miami to Huaque	Huaque

The following is timeline developed for Natalia's (MC, 28) case. Natalia preferred making reference to her age at the time of migration. From her timeline we can observe that she left for the first time to the USA when she was 15 years old and lived in Georgia for seven years. When she became 22 years old she realised that as long as she was undocumented she would be unable to find a 'proper' job and decided to return to Mexico where she spent just nine months. As she missed her family and was unable to adapt to Mexico, she decided to head back to Georgia where she spent one more year. During that time in the USA, she confirmed that she had no future in the USA as an undocumented migrant and decided to re-return to Mexico when she was 24 years old. She had lived four years in Mexico at the time of the interview.

15 y.o.		22 y.o.		23 y.o.		24 y.o.		28 y.o.
	7 years		9 months		1 year		4 years	
MC	Georgia	Georgia	MC	MC	Georgia	Georgia	MC	MC
to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to
Georgia	MC	MC	Georgia	Georgia	MC	MC	MC	MC